Forum Philosophicum

Volume 31 number 1 Spring 2026

FORUM PHILOSOPHICUM is a scholarly journal dedicated to philosophical inquiries into various respects of the relationship between philosophy and faith. It is published bi-annually in English by Ignatianum University Press, part of the University Ignatianum in Cracow. The journal exists in both paper and electronic versions. The online version is available via the EBSCO Academic Search Complete electronic database (since vol. 6, 2001) and the Philosophy Documentation Center online subscription service (since vol. 1, 1996). Since vol. 23, 2018, all articles are published in full open-access model based on Creative Commons Attribution (BY) license. Selected earlier articles are published in open access on the journal's website.

Cover Design Jacek Zaryczny
ISSN (online) 2353-7043
www https://forumphilosophicum.ignatianum.edu.pl
Typeset by Jacek Zaryczny with Libertinus Serif open font

More information about *Forum Philosophicum*—its mission, contact data, Boards, submissions to the journal, editorial policies, subscriptions, online indexes, may be found in the Note about *Forum Philosophicum* on page 145.

Forum Philosophicum

International Journal for Philosophy

Volume 31 number 1 Spring 2026

Articles

Discussions

Articles

Health Responsibility

Initial Musings on Aquinas' Charity and Antibiotic Resistance

Wesley Kim Soguilon

Abstract This article presents an expository study of the views of St. Thomas Aquinas regarding the virtue of charity and the increasing problem of antibiotic resistance in the contemporary world. I explore how the virtue of charity in Aquinas may help shed light on the formulation of possible ways to address this problem. The paper argues that Aquinas' charity forms the individual, out of love, to be responsible for their own and others' health, in ways that are especially relevant to antibiotics. To accomplish this, I first deal with his conception of the virtue of charity and the place of the common good within it. Then I briefly outline the background to the problem of antibiotic resistance and its consequences. Finally, I discuss how Aquinas' idea of charity could be helpful to the formation of human beings as this relates to employing antibiotics responsibly, given that our use of them not only impacts on ourselves but also on others.

Keywords antibiotics; charity; common good; drug use; health responsibility

✍ Wesley Kim Soguilon, Numancia, Phillipines ✉ soguilonwesleykim@gmail.com 0000-0003-0542-1915

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 5–16
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043
Subm. 22 May 2025 Acc. 22 May 2025
DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.01

In this article, I will explore how the virtue of charity in Aquinas may help shed light on the formulation of possible ways to address the problem of antibiotic resistance, arguing that Aquinas' virtue of charity forms the individual to be responsible for their own and others' health out of love and the prioritization of the common good. We live in a world full of medical wonders: over the last century, we have seen many medical innovations that help us live better and more healthily today. One of those wonders or—I should say—developments is the use of antibiotics. The latter, on a layman's understanding, are "compounds that target bacteria and, thus, are intended to treat and prevent bacterial infections" (Patel et al. 2023). This means that they are medicines made up of chemical compounds that treat sickness or illnesses caused by bacteria. An important point to be noted here is that bacteria are microorganisms that continue to adapt to different environments. They are "metabolically active . . . multiply at rapid rates . . . and adapt to changing environments, [making them] a major cause of disease and important in every field of medicine" (Baron 1996). Because of the capacity of bacteria to adapt, antibiotics were developed. In particular, the mechanism of antibiotics consists in their functioning to destroy "the bacterial cell by either preventing cell reproduction or changing a necessary cellular function or process within the cell" (Patel et al. 2023). With the bacterial cell that enables the bacteria to adapt destroyed, bacteria cannot grow and reproduce anymore.

The emergence of antibiotics has brought them into the public sphere and into our daily lives. They have become essential to the latter: an element without which most of us would be unable to live well, given the benefits they bring. One of these is the fact that they can prevent or treat bacterial infections and illnesses of the sort that may potentially affect patients who

> are receiving chemotherapy treatments; who have chronic diseases such as diabetes, end-stage renal disease, or rheumatoid arthritis; or who have had complex surgeries such as organ transplants, joint replacements, or cardiac surgery. (Ventola 2015, 278)

This means that they not only serve as treatments for existing illnesses, but also function preventatively by hampering bacterial growth of the sort that may result in illnesses affecting vulnerable patients. This brings us to another benefit of antibiotics: their use in preventative medicine. They are used as a prophylaxis or agent to prevent bacterial emergence and multiplication in contexts where surgical operations are being conducted (Weledji et al. 2017). Penicillin, the first antibiotic, was used mainly for

treatment and prophylaxis. Furthermore, antibiotics raise our chances of survival: their employment in places that have high mortality rates has the potential to increase the survival of individuals prone to sickness (Flasche and Atkins 2018).

As beneficial as antibiotics are to us today, their misuse, and the lack of new developments in antibiotic medicine, has resulted in what academic researchers call the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis. The latter can be characterized as an increase of threatening bacterial infections due to the rapid surfacing of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, this being a result of the overuse and misuse of antibiotics themselves (Ventola 2015). Because of the capacity of bacteria to adapt, and the misuse of—and lack of new developments in respect of—antibiotics, bacteria can adapt to the supposed benefits of antibiotics and overcome them. This brings with it a plethora of problems, one of which is the unconstrained adaptation of bacteria.

That situation furnishes the point of entry for the research to be presented here. While not being a medical professional, or someone who has studied the sciences, I aim to put forward a possible layman's solution to the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis—one separate from medicine, and issuing instead from a moral perspective. In my view, this crisis only began because of the misuse and abuse of antibiotics. Considering this, my paper will explore what we can do, as humans, to prevent the furtherance of this crisis in the light of St. Thomas Aquinas' virtue of charity. Its central thought is that through the latter's virtue of charity, we can be responsible humans when it comes to our own and others' health. Through the virtue of charity, the individual may be formed to be responsible for their own and other's health out of love and the prioritization of the common good.

To accomplish this, I shall first deal with St. Thomas Aquinas' conception of the virtue of charity and the place of the common good within it. Then I shall briefly outline the background to the problem of antibiotic resistance, along with its consequences. Finally, I shall discuss how Aquinas' idea of charity could be helpful to the formation of human beings as this relates to employing antibiotics responsibly, given that our use of them not only impacts on ourselves but also on others.

So let us first deal with St. Thomas Aquinas' idea of the virtue of charity and the place of the common good within it. Aquinas would understand charity or *caritas* as an infused virtue in the soul, since it makes the person possessing it, and their works, good (Aquinas, *De Virtutibus*, art. 2, resp.). It is a virtue precisely because it makes the person love, and act for, the good—in that the person loves the good to which they aspire. He or she longs to possess that highest good, which is pursued for its own sake, and then

share it with others—a case of beatific vision. Since it makes the person aspire to the highest good (which is what beatific vision involves), charity is a virtue, and the highest among them. St. Thomas Aquinas says that charity makes man love [sic] "God for His own sake, and loves fellow-men who are capable of attaining beatitude as it loves itself; charity resists every hindrance both in itself and in others" (Aquinas, *De Virtutibus*, art. 2, resp.). Here one can see that *caritas* also makes man overcome obstacles to loving: they become courageous enough to love others and share their goodness despite the challenges that they may face.

Since love involves some sort of communication or outpouring of one's goodness, it is intimately linked to friendship. Caritas is the friendship between man and God, since there is mutual love (which is a requirement for friendship) between them (Aquinas, Summa Theologica, q. 24, art. 2, resp.). Friendship, in St. Thomas Aquinas' thought, is the willing of the good of the other. It is a person's desire for another person's good, and the former's effort to bring that good about in their friend (Wadell 2014, 377). In this scheme, the friendship of man with God is a love-relationship of man with God. God loves man as His created creature and wills his good, and man loves God in return by living according to His ways and committing to work for His plans in our world (Wadell 2014, 377). However, the love man has for God is not on the same footing as that of God for man. There are two reasons for this: first, man is not on the same level of existence as God. God is Divine, and man is—it has to be admitted—human. Second, the virtue of charity itself is caused by "the infusion of the Holy Ghost, Who is the love of the Father and the Son, and the participation of Whom in us is created charity" (Aquinas, Summa Theologica, q. 24, art. 2, resp.). This means that the virtue of charity is a gift or grace from God that is given to us. Our acts of charity, which may stem from "a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith," are acts that "dispose man [sic] to receive the infusion of charity" or the grace of God that makes us love God and our neighbor wholly (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 24, art. 2, resp. to obj.). In all of this, St. Thomas Aquinas argued that friendship is based on virtue. The virtue in this case—which is charity—is, however, one that comes from God and not solely from our own efforts (Ney 2006, 5).

Now, as St. Thomas Aquinas understood it, the kind of friendship that is necessitated by charity is one that obtains between God and man because God, the one to be seen in the beatific vision, is man's source of happiness (in that the beatific vision is the highest good that man longs for, which means that God is man's ultimate source of happiness) (*Summa Theologica*, q. 26, art. 2, resp.). God takes precedence in man's act of loving,

yet the proper love for God does not end there: it is shared by loving others, since the happiness we receive from God is shared. In other words, the story of love does not end there. In fact, man's proper love of God recognizes others as subjects to be loved, which stems from man's affection for the Divine. The happiness we receive from God is also received by others in their love for God, and since happiness is a good that is shared as it pours out from the Divine, we love our neighbors as well:

> Therefore God ought to be loved chiefly and before all out of charity: for He is loved as the cause of happiness, whereas our neighbor is loved as receiving together with us a share of happiness from Him. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 26, art. 2, resp.)

From this, we can infer that loving God requires us to also love others. Our relationship with God, though primary relative to other relationships, does not make us turn our faces away from others. It is quite the opposite, since our love for God extends to us loving others in that all people belong to Him (Ney 2006, 4). It makes us reach out, face them directly, and extend ourselves to them by being charitable and loving them.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, particularly in the treatise of St. Thomas Aquinas on the order of charity, we go back to the point we have mentioned earlier: that man must love his neighbors by virtue of their being subjects of love due to our fellowship with them in their partaking of God's good. Our relationship with others, taken as a relation of human persons under God, is our fellowship with others, and this fellowship is the reason for our act of love towards them (*Summa Theologica*, q. 26, art. 4, resp.). This fellowship, which becomes the basis for loving, is a mandate for us to love our neighbors as an expression of our love for God. Particularly in St. Thomas Aquinas' thought, man's perfect love of God consists in our "love of [our] neighbor [since it] includes love of God, while love of God [alone] does not include love of our neighbor" (*Summa Theologica*, q. 27, art. 8, resp.). Man loves God and his creation, and does everything he can to have a good relationship with him, in the same way as God loves man and provides for his good (*Summa Theologica*, q. 27, art. 8, resp.).

Note here how one can love God by loving His creation. This means that everyone is mandated to love one's neighbors, since they are bearers of God's image and dignity (*Summa Theologica*, q. 27, art. 8, resp.). Not only that, but loving one's neighbor is an instance of charity being true to itself: it is seeking something outside of the self (*Summa Theologica*, q. 25, art. 1, resp.). It is going out of the self to seek the good, particularly the common

good, in that this takes priority over self-interest. True charity, then, in loving one's neighbor, is to put the common good above all else, even above individual preferences: "the common good is always more lovable to the individual than his private good, even as the good of the whole is more lovable to the part, than the latter's own partial good" (*Summa Theologica*, q. 26, art. 4, resp. to obj.). To love one's neighbors is to love and prefer the common good, because the good of the whole and of others is prioritized over the self.

To love others is to express our love for God more profoundly and completely. It is an expression of how deep our love for God is, since loving God in charity must make us see that our neighbors also partake in the happiness God gives to us. In other words,

> to love our neighbors for God's sake is to love them as beings like ourselves who are prized by God and precious to God and who, like ourselves, are capable of loving and enjoying God. (Wadell 2014, 381)

With this, we see our neighbors as human beings like us who deserve our love: they are other selves or humans who live with us in this world as partakers of God's goodness. God is in them just as He is with us, since they, too, are creatures of Him and, in loving them, we express our love for God (Costa 2024, 84). Because of that, it would only be right and just to prioritize the good of all or the common good instead of one's own interests. In prioritizing the common good, one loves one's neighbors, as the common good is preferable to one's own good. It makes the lover achieve the ultimate good by realizing the common good, and this is only possible if loving God and one's neighbors is placed first, ahead of one's own interests (Costa 2024, 85).

We shall now discuss, albeit briefly and from a layman's perspective, antibiotic resistance and its consequences. The contemporary world faces this problem because bacteria that were treated by antibiotics are adapting to the effects of antibiotics, making them immune or resistant to the latter. The problem stems from antibiotic misuse, overuse, and lack of development, resulting in the emergence of drug-resistant bacteria (Habboush and Guzman 2023). Aside from that, agricultural overuse, inappropriate prescribing, and lack of regulation of antibiotics have all contributed to this development (Ventola 2015). Now, as was mentioned in the earlier part of this work, bacteria have an adaptive capacity: they can adapt based on the conditions they are in. This is because they are metabolically active microorganisms that rapidly multiply and are able to adapt to survive

(Baron 1996). What this in turn means is that when exposed to the antibiotics of today, and given that these antibiotics are misused, bacteria can overcome the supposed beneficial effects of antibiotics. They can become drug-resistant and harder to eliminate.

In contemporary terms, there are already cases where bacteria are proving resistant: hence the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis we are facing today. For example, there is an increase in drug-resistant fungal infections, and a surge in drug resistance amongst patients suffering from HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and tropical diseases such as leprosy (World Health Organization 2023). Furthermore, "*Staphylococcus aureus*, urinary tract infections caused by *E. coli*, and *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, a common intestinal bacterium, also showed elevated resistance levels against critical antibiotics" (World Health Organization 2023). Moreover, the emergence of this kind of bacteria led to "1.27 million global deaths in 2019 and contributed to 4.95 million deaths" (Habboush and Guzman 2023).

Additionally, across all the regions of the globe, the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis (hereinafter referred to as just "the crisis") currently affects everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status. It does so because bacteria are transmitted through what are pretty much normal everyday activities such as handshaking, working out, preparing and eating food, traveling, or having contact with pets or other animals (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2024). The crisis, furthermore, is "exacerbated by poverty and inequality, and low- and middle-income countries are most affected" (World Health Organization 2023). It also puts many of the developments and innovations of modern medicine at risk. For instance, it renders infections harder to treat, and makes other medical procedures and treatments, such as surgery, cesarean sections, and cancer chemotherapy, much riskier (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2024). In the absence of a proper approach to using antibiotics, bacteria will continue to adapt and become ever more drug-resistant, making treatment of and recovery from illnesses more difficult in years to come.

Despite being invented for the sake of their beneficial uses and effects, we have seen that antibiotics themselves can do little today to ameliorate the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis. Supposedly a help and a friend instead of a foe, they have become harmful due to our misuse and abuse of them. It all hinges on us: how we use antibiotics will dictate the future development of the crisis. If we continue to be irresponsible in our approach, then we will be left with an increasingly harmful scenario. However, if we use them responsibly, I think we can alleviate the crisis a little—in that the latter is complex in itself. Given those considerations, we shall now discuss how

St. Thomas Aquinas' idea of charity relates to the antibiotic crisis. I shall argue that, for Aquinas, charity forms the individual out of love to be responsible for their and others' health, and that this is nowhere more relevant than where our use of antibiotics is concerned. This argument stems from charity's being a virtue, which means that it has effects on man and his or her soul.

St. Thomas Aquinas stipulated that charity, as a virtue, exerts effects on the soul. The more that a person obeys God's commands and cultivates the virtue of *caritas* through acts of charity, the more he or she becomes like God and grows closer to Him in such a way that grace enters the scene. As he put it:

> The human mind's movement to the fruition of the Divine good is the proper act of charity, whereby all the acts of the other virtues are ordained to this end, since all the other virtues are commanded by charity. Hence, the merit of life everlasting pertains first to charity, and secondly, to the other virtues, inasmuch as their acts are commanded by charity. So, likewise, is it manifest that what we do out of love we do most willingly. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 114, art. 4, resp.)

Now, grace assists the soul in attaining beatific vision or direct vision of God (Dauphinais and Levering 2002, 127). In simple terms, it assists the soul in attaining eternal life in heaven. And how does it do this? By elevating the intellect to achieve beatific vision, where this is done based on the degree of love that a person possesses, in that we are all judged by the way we have loved (Dauphinais and Levering 2002, 127). This means that the more a person loves God and others, the more he or she will know and see God. Beatific vision, then, is attained by the one who has loved God and his or her neighbors well.

One of the acts intrinsic to charity is joy. Feeling this in the presence of a friend's well-being is the effect of charity on the soul. If, however, a person's friend lacks something—and much more if it is his or her well-being—the person becomes sorrowful, and the sadness felt is a "sorrow [that] arises from love, either through the absence of the thing loved, or because the loved object to which we wish well, is deprived of its good or afflicted with some evil" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 28, art. 1, resp.). I would like to point out that there are two ideas here that we have to focus on. First, we also suffer because of our neighbor's suffering. This is because of our love for them, which makes us experience their sufferings as if they were our own (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 30, art. 1, resp.). Referring back to mercy and *caritas*, one

must love one's neighbor by practicing charity: that is, by caring for them as their situation demands. St. Thomas Aquinas is not convinced that wishing and praying for the well-being of one's neighbor is already love: we must relieve the suffering of others and "give to the needy out of our compassion and for God's sake" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 32, art. 1, resp.). In other words, true love goes beyond well-wishing. That is why, for him, real charity is manifested through actions, and "Aquinas divides these acts into three categories: (1) acts of beneficence, (2) almsgiving, and (3) fraternal correction" (Floyd 2009). In particular, mercy belongs to the second category. Compassion and mercy here become connected, since mercy compels the person to have compassion for those who are suffering and be compassionate to them by alleviating their sorrow (Floyd 2009).

Now, where charity as a virtue is concerned, St. Thomas Aquinas would highlight three acts that fall under this category: beneficence, almsdeeds and fraternal correction. They are performed as acts of love, since we must love our neighbors:

> The reason for loving is indicated in the word 'neighbor,' because the reason why we ought to love others out of charity is because they are nigh to us, both as to the natural image of God, and as to the capacity for glory. (Aquinas, Summa Theologica, q. 44, art. 7, resp.)

With that, our acts of beneficence, almsdeeds and fraternal correction must be done to our neighbors out of our love for them. Beneficence is, prima facie, doing good to someone. The good done may consist in any good charitable act,

> because the act of love includes goodwill whereby a man wishes his friend well. . . . Now the will carries into effect, if possible, the things it wills, so that, consequently, the result of an act of love is that a man is beneficent to his friend. Therefore, beneficence in its general acceptation is an act of friendship or charity. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 31, art. 1, resp.)

Following this characterization, we can state that any good act done out of charity, as long as it is intended and really is for our neighbor's good, is an act of beneficence. On top of that, beneficence concerns all. We must do good to all regardless of their status:

> Since the love of charity extends to all, beneficence also should extend to all, but accordingly as time and place require: because all acts of virtue must be

> modified with a view to their due circumstances. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 31, art. 2, resp.)

Connecting this to the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis, our act of using antibiotics responsibly out of concern for others and the world and their good may be considered an act of beneficence. Since antibiotic resistance is a global challenge, all are called to be cautious and proper in using antibiotics, as one's use affects the health of others (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2024). The health of others, like ours, is also our responsibility. Additionally, our prayers for those who do suffer because of the crisis, and for the development of antibiotics, may be considered acts of beneficence, in that "there is, however, a good that we can do to all, if not to each individual, at least to all in general, as when we pray for all, for unbelievers as well as for the faithful" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 31, art. 2, resp. to obj. 1). Moreover, fraternal correction, as an act of charity and justice that remedies the hurtful actions of others that are "detrimental to the common good," may take the form of informing and educating others about the proper way of using antibiotics (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 33, art. 1, resp.). Courses of action such as getting to know the symptoms of antibiotic resistance, asking questions, learning the right ways to use antibiotics, and educating others—above all patients already taking them—about the side effects they may come to experience, are all ways of preventing the proliferation of the crisis (National Foundation for Infectious Diseases 2023). All are called to attend to medical experts, deferring to both medical advice and moral considerations, to use antibiotics properly, to educate those who may be lacking in knowledge in this area, and to pray for those who are sick—especially patients using antibiotics.

We have been exploring here how the virtue of charity may be able to provide solutions to the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis. We first dealt with the virtue of charity as understood by St. Thomas Aquinas, and the place of the common good within it. Moving on from that, we turned to the reality of the crisis today, and its effects. After this, we explored how the virtue of charity, as a virtue that has effects on the soul, may be able to help in alleviating the further proliferation of this crisis. The real challenge now is to be a force for good in this tragic world: it is to apply what has been learned in one's life by using antibiotics properly as an act of charity.

Given that the research presented here is preliminary in its scope and nature, further studies of the issue might be expected to revolve around the following topics connected with the crisis: the political common good in St. Thomas Aquinas' thought, a broadened focus on the societal common good, a detailed exposition and inclusion of some other sources

and questions pertaining to charity, such as *De Virtutibus* and *De Caritate*, the person's cultivation of charity, the issue of *Ordo Amoris* in human moral acting, and non-Christian or non-Thomistic views on charity and how it might contribute to possible solutions to the crisis.

Bibliography

Aquinas, Thomas. 1911–1925. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers.

—. n.d. "Whether Charity Is a Virtue?" Translated by Lottie H. Kendzierski. In *Quaestiones Disputatae: De Virtutibus*. Accessed August 30, 2024. https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/QDdeVirtutibus2.htm#2.

Baron, Samuel, ed. 1996. "Introduction to Bacteriology." In *Medical Microbiology*. 4th ed. Galveston, TX: University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Accessed August 26, 2024. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK8120/.

Costa, Iacopo. 2024. "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Charity and the Common Good." In *Common Good and Self-Interest in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, edited by Heikki Haara and Juhana Toivanen, 75–90. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55304-2.

Dauphinais, Michael, and Matthew Levering. 2002. *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Flasche, Stefan, and Katherine E. Atkins. 2018. "Balancing Benefits and Risks of Antibiotic Use." *Journal of Infectious Diseases* 218 (9): 1351–1353. https://doi.org/10.1093/infdis/jiy344.

Floyd, Shawn. 2009. "Aquinas and the Obligations of Mercy." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37 (3): 449–471. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2009.00394.x.

Habboush, Yacob, and Nilmarie Guzman. 2023. "Antibiotic Resistance." In StatPearls. Treasure Island, FL: StatPearls Publishing. Last updated June 20, 2023. Accessed September 1, 2024. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK513277/.

National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. 2023. "Antibiotic Resistance." NFID. Updated November 2023. Accessed September 12, 2024. https://www.nfid.org/antibiotic-resistance/.

Ney, Philip. 2006. "Charity as the Perfection of Natural Friendship in Aquinas' Summa Theologiae." *Lethbridge Undergraduate Research Journal* 1 (1): 1–8. http://hdl.handle.net/10133/461.

Patel, Preeti, Harrison R. Wermuth, Chara Calhoun, and Gregory A. Hall. 2023. "Antibiotics." In *StatPearls*. Treasure Island, FL: StatPearls Publishing. Updated May 26, 2023. Accessed February 23, 2026. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK535443/.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2024. "Antimicrobial Resistance." CDC. Updated April 22, 2024. Accessed September 1, 2024. https://www.cdc.gov/antimicrobial-resistance/causes/index.html.

Ventola, C. Lee. 2015. "The Antibiotic Resistance Crisis: Part 1: Causes and Threats." *P & T: A Peer-Reviewed Journal for Formulary Management* 40 (4): 277–283. Accessed August 26, 2024. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4378521/.

Wadell, Paul J. 2014. "Charity: How Friendship with God Unfolds in Love for Others." In *Virtues and Their Vices*, edited by Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd, 369–392. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Weledji, Elroy P., Elizabeth K. Weledji, Jules C. Assob, and Dickson S. Nsagha. 2017. "Pros, Cons and Future of Antibiotics." *New Horizons in Translational Medicine* 4 (1–4): 9–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nhtm.2017.08.001.

World Health Organization. 2023. "Antimicrobial Resistance." WHO. Accessed September 1, 2024. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antimicrobial-resistance.

Fragment and Totality
The Philosophical Form of Gregory Palamas' One Hundred and Fifty Chapters

Wojciech Słomski

Abstract This article offers a philosophical analysis of Gregory Palamas' *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, focusing on the philosophical form through which the text articulates unity and totality. Rather than treating the fragmentary structure of the *Capita* as a secondary vehicle for doctrinal content, the study argues that fragmentation performs a constitutive philosophical function.

Situated within the context of ancient and late antique philosophy, particularly Neoplatonism and the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, the analysis explores how fragmentary articulation safeguards unity from reduction to a conceptual system. In these traditions, such a mode of ontological articulation affirms totality without totalisation. Against this background, Palamas' work is interpreted as enacting a model of unity that resists discursive synthesis.

The article demonstrates that the coherence of the *Capita* arises not from linear argumentation or deductive order, but from relations of resonance, repetition, and mutual illumination among autonomous fragments. Totality remains operative as a real horizon of intelligibility without being constructed or closed. Ultimately, the philosophical form of the *Chapters* is presented as an instance of "totality without system," offering a significant alternative to modern totalising models of metaphysical thought.

Keywords Byzantine philosophy; Neoplatonism; Non-systematic ontology; One Hundred and Fifty Chapters; Palamas, Gregory; Philosophical form; Unity; Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

✍ Wojciech Słomski, University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw; College of International Bussines ISM Slovakia ✉ slomski@autograf.pl 🆔 0000-0003-1532-0341

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 17–30 Subm. 10 December 2025 Acc. 10 February 2026
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043 DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.02

INTRODUCTION

The treatise commonly known as *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters (Capita physica, theologica, moralia et practica)* occupies a distinctive position within the corpus of Gregory Palamas. While it has frequently been approached as a compendium of doctrinal theses—most notably in relation to the essence–energies distinction and the Hesychast controversy—its formal structure has rarely been subjected to sustained philosophical analysis. The text resists classification within the dominant genres of late Byzantine theological writing: it is neither a systematic treatise, nor a polemical disputation, nor a continuous exegetical commentary. Instead, it presents itself as a sequence of short, self-contained units whose internal density contrasts sharply with the absence of explicit argumentative transitions.

This formal peculiarity raises a fundamental philosophical question: whether the fragmentary structure of the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* is merely a contingent literary device or functions as an integral component of Palamas' philosophical articulation of reality. The present study argues that the form of the *Capita* is not accidental, or reducible to pedagogical convenience, but constitutes a deliberate philosophical strategy through which Palamas articulates a non-totalising ontology. Fragmentation, in this context, is not a sign of incompleteness or lack of system, but the very condition under which totality can be affirmed without being conceptually enclosed.

From a philosophical perspective, the problem at stake concerns the relation between form and ontological commitment. In much of the history of metaphysics, systematic totality has been closely associated with discursive continuity, deductive order, and the subordination of parts to an explicitly articulated whole. By contrast, fragmentary forms—aphorisms, κεφάλαια, sententiae—have often been regarded as secondary or provisional modes of expression, incapable of bearing full metaphysical weight. The *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* challenges this assumption by presenting a model of thought in which the whole is neither deduced from first principles nor synthesised through conceptual mediation, but disclosed through the irreducible plurality of articulated moments.

The relevance of this problem becomes clearer when the *Capita* are situated within the broader context of late antique and Byzantine philosophical traditions. Fragmentary writing had long functioned as a legitimate philosophical form, from the aphorisms of Heraclitus to the structured discontinuity of Plotinus' *Enneads* and the hierarchical yet non-discursive exposition of Proclus' *Elements of Theology.* Within Christian thought, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite represents a particularly significant

precedent, combining highly condensed propositions with a deliberate refusal of exhaustive conceptual determination (*De divinis nominibus*). Palamas' *Capita* stand in a complex relation to this tradition: while clearly indebted to earlier philosophical and theological models, they develop a distinctive formal logic that cannot be reduced either to Neoplatonic emanationism or to scholastic systematisation.

Despite the centrality of the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* for Palamas' thought, modern scholarship has overwhelmingly prioritised their doctrinal content over their formal configuration. Classical interpretations, particularly those associated with Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff, have rightly emphasised the theological significance of the treatise in articulating the real distinction between essence and energies and in defending the experiential reality of divine participation (Lossky 1957; Meyendorff 1959; 1998). Subsequent studies have refined these insights by situating Palamas within the broader landscape of Byzantine philosophy and by clarifying his engagement with Aristotelian and Neoplatonic conceptual vocabularies (Bradshaw 2004; Tatakis 1949).

Yet within this extensive body of scholarship, relatively little attention has been paid to the philosophical implications of the *Capita*'s fragmentary form as such. When the form is mentioned at all, it is typically treated as a neutral container for doctrinal propositions or as a secondary literary feature without independent philosophical significance. As a result, a crucial dimension of Palamas' thought remains underexplored: the possibility that the rejection of systematic totalisation at the level of form corresponds to a deeper metaphysical commitment to irreducible distinction and non-identitarian unity.

The present article seeks to address this lacuna by offering a philosophical analysis of the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* focused explicitly on the relationship between fragment and totality. Rather than reconstructing Palamas' doctrinal positions, the study examines how the formal structure of the *Capita* functions as a mode of philosophical articulation. The central hypothesis is that fragmentation operates as a safeguard against ontological monism and conceptual closure, enabling the affirmation of totality without collapsing difference into identity. In this sense, the form of the Capita embodies a philosophical stance according to which reality cannot be exhaustively grasped through a single, continuous conceptual synthesis.

The guiding questions of this study may be formulated as follows. First, what philosophical function does the fragmentary form serve within the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*? Second, how does this form relate to earlier philosophical uses of fragmentation in Neoplatonic and Dionysian

traditions? Third, in what sense can the *Capita* be said to articulate a conception of totality that is non-systematic yet ontologically robust? Finally, what are the implications of this form for understanding Palamas' broader philosophical orientation, particularly with regard to the limits of conceptual determination?

Methodologically, the article combines close hermeneutical analysis of the Greek text of the *Capita* with comparative philosophical interpretation. Primary attention is given to the internal structure of the chapters themselves, including their syntactic compression, thematic distribution, and absence of linear argumentative progression. These features are analysed in dialogue with selected passages from Palamas' *Triads*, where explicit reflection on knowledge, distinction, and divine transcendence provides an essential contextual framework. In addition, the study draws on key texts of Neoplatonism and the Dionysian corpus in order to clarify the philosophical background against which Palamas' formal choices acquire their full significance.

The perspective adopted here is deliberately philosophical rather than theological. While the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* are undeniably embedded in a theological horizon, the present analysis does not aim to evaluate their doctrinal correctness or soteriological implications. Instead, it treats the text as a philosophical artifact whose form conveys a distinctive understanding of unity, plurality, and the limits of discursive reason. By focusing on form rather than doctrinal content, the article seeks to illuminate a dimension of Palamas' thought that remains largely implicit yet philosophically consequential.

In pursuing this approach, the study does not claim that Palamas developed a formal theory of fragmentation, or consciously reflected on literary form in abstract terms. Rather, it argues that the *Capita* enact a philosophical logic that can be reconstructed through careful analysis of their structure and internal coherence. The aim is therefore not to impose modern categories onto a medieval text, but to articulate the philosophical implications of a form of thought that resists systematic enclosure while nevertheless affirming the intelligibility of reality.

The article proceeds in three stages. The first section examines the fragment as a philosophical form within late antique and Byzantine traditions, with particular attention to Neoplatonic and Dionysian precedents. The second section analyses the internal structure of the *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, focusing on the relation between discontinuity and coherence. The third section explores the concept of totality implied by this form, arguing that Palamas articulates a model of unity that is irreducible

to system without thereby dissolving into mere plurality. The conclusion summarises the philosophical significance of this model and indicates its relevance for broader discussions concerning the limits of metaphysical systematisation.

Section I: The Fragment as a Philosophical Form

The use of fragmentary forms as vehicles of philosophical articulation possesses a long and complex genealogy, reaching back to the earliest stages of metaphysical reflection. Contrary to the modern identification of philosophy with systematic exposition, discursive continuity, and deductive closure, ancient and late antique thought frequently employed condensed, discontinuous, and aphoristic forms in order to express claims of the highest ontological generality. In this context, the fragment does not signal incompleteness or methodological weakness; rather, it functions as a deliberate mode of articulation appropriate to a reality that resists total conceptual enclosure.

Already in pre-Socratic philosophy, the fragment constitutes the primary unit of intelligibility. The extant sayings of Heraclitus, preserved almost exclusively in the form of short and apparently independent utterances, do not amount to a system in the formal sense. Nevertheless, they presuppose an ontological whole that cannot be captured within a continuous conceptual narrative. The fragment here operates as a site of tension between what is articulated and what remains unsayable, suggesting that the truth of being is not available in the form of an exhaustive discourse (see Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9).

This mode of thought is further developed and transformed within the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions. Although Plato's dialogues maintain the appearance of discursive continuity, their structure is marked by interruptions, aporiai, and deliberate non-closure, which prevent the reduction of philosophical insight to a doctrinal system. In later Neoplatonism, the tension between unity and multiplicity finds expression not only at the level of ontology but also at the level of philosophical form. Plotinus, despite the posthumous editorial ordering of the *Enneads* by Porphyry, proceeds through dense and self-contained argumentative units that lead not to synthetic totalisation but to the contemplative apprehension of being as hierarchically differentiated unity.

A particularly significant point of reference for the philosophical logic of fragmentary form is provided by Proclus. His *Elements of Theology* represent a radical departure from discursive continuity in favour of a sequence of short, numbered propositions. Each proposition possesses formal autonomy

while remaining oriented toward a whole that is never exhaustively reconstructed within a single cognitive act (Proclus 1963). Proclus' method is not deductive in the modern logical sense; rather, it unfolds the structure of reality through a series of partial determinations, each of which preserves its irreducible limitation. The fragment thus assumes an epistemological function: it protects unity from being reduced to conceptual identity.

Within Christian thought, the philosophical significance of fragmentary form reaches a distinctive articulation in the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In *De divinis nominibus*, one encounters a mode of exposition characterised by high conceptual density combined with a systematic resistance to doctrinal closure. Dionysius proceeds through short chapters and compressed sequences of names, in which affirmation and negation remain in unresolved tension at the level of discourse. This fragmentary structure is not accidental; it corresponds to the ontological conviction that the divine reality exceeds every form of conceptual synthesis and can only be indicated through a plurality of necessary yet intrinsically inadequate determinations (Pseudo-Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*; Stróżewski 1955–1957).

In this sense, the fragment functions in Dionysius as a philosophical instrument safeguarding transcendence against the violence of conceptual appropriation. Each fragment discloses an aspect of the whole while simultaneously annulling any claim to possess it. The whole remains real, yet irreducible to system. This formal strategy is philosophical rather than merely theological: it concerns the relation between being and knowledge and delineates the limits of metaphysical discourse as such (Beierwaltes 1998; Louth 2007).

Against this background, the form of the *Capita physica, theologica, moralia et practica* of Gregory Palamas appears not as an anomaly but as a conscious continuation and transformation of a well-established philosophical tradition. Palamas adopts the form of the kephalaia, familiar from both ascetical literature and earlier philosophical-theological writings, yet he deploys it in a manner that carries a distinct philosophical significance. The individual chapters do not constitute a linear argumentative sequence in the scholastic sense, nor do they aim at deductive synthesis. Each chapter functions as an autonomous unit of sense whose relation to the whole remains implicit and non-totalised (Palamas, *Capita*, PG 150).

The fragmentary structure of the *Capita* does not entail disorder or arbitrariness. On the contrary, it presupposes the reality of a whole that cannot be directly expressed. This whole, however, is not a conceptual system but an ontological structure whose unity does not abolish real

distinction. Fragmentation thus enables the articulation of unity without its objectification. In this respect, the fragment becomes an instrument of philosophical discipline: it prevents the identification of unity with sameness and of totality with conceptual closure (Meyendorff 1959; Lossky 1957).

From a philosophical standpoint, it is crucial to note that fragmentary form does not imply relativism or scepticism. It does not renounce truth or ontology; rather, it presupposes a different mode of their articulation. Truth is not something that can be possessed in a single cognitive act, but something that manifests itself through a plurality of partial and mutually irreducible determinations. The fragment does not negate the whole; it protects it from reduction.

Understood in this way, the philosophical form of the fragment provides an essential key for interpreting the *Capita* of Gregory Palamas. They are neither a collection of isolated maxims nor an abbreviated version of a larger system awaiting reconstruction. Their fragmentariness is constitutive: it corresponds to an ontology in which unity does not annul difference and totality is affirmed without being enclosed within a system. The following section will deepen this analysis by examining the internal structure of *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, focusing on the relation between discontinuity and coherence at the level of the text itself.

Section II: Discontinuity and Coherence in the Structure of the One Hundred and Fifty Chapters

At first sight, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* present a striking impression of formal discontinuity. The text lacks explicit transitions, sustained argumentative sequences, and any hierarchical ordering of propositions. Individual chapters vary in length, thematic focus, and conceptual density, often juxtaposing cosmological, anthropological, and metaphysical claims without discursive mediation. From the perspective of systematic philosophy, such a structure may appear deficient or merely compilatory. Yet a closer examination reveals that this discontinuity is neither accidental nor destructive of coherence. Rather, it constitutes a specific mode of philosophical organisation in which coherence is achieved without linear continuity.

The absence of explicit argumentative progression does not imply the absence of internal order. Instead of any deductive linkage, the *Capita* operate through thematic recurrence, conceptual resonance, and structural parallelism. Certain key notions—such as unity and multiplicity, distinction without separation, intelligibility without comprehension—reappear across different chapters without being formally defined or exhaustively

developed in any single place (Palamas, *Capita*, PG 150). Coherence thus emerges not from logical derivation but from a network of mutual illumination among fragments.

This mode of coherence corresponds to a philosophical logic in which the whole is not constructed through the summation of parts but presupposed as the horizon within which each fragment acquires intelligibility. Each chapter functions as a self-contained articulation that nevertheless points beyond itself, implicitly referring to a shared ontological field. The reader is not guided through a sequence of premises and conclusions, but is instead invited to discern relations across discontinuous articulations. In this respect, the structure of the *Capita* aligns more closely with contemplative or noetic modes of philosophical engagement than with discursive demonstration (see Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3).

A comparison with Proclus' *Elements of Theology* further clarifies this logic. Although Proclus presents his propositions in a numbered sequence that suggests a deductive order, the coherence of the *Elements* does not depend on strict inferential necessity. Each proposition articulates a partial determination of reality that presupposes, rather than produces, the intelligibility of the whole (Proclus 1963). Similarly, in the *Capita*, numerical ordering does not correspond to argumentative dependency. The sequence of chapters establishes a rhythm rather than a proof, indicating a path of intelligibility that unfolds through reiteration and variation rather than through logical compulsion.

Within the Christian philosophical tradition, Pseudo-Dionysius provides a further point of reference. In De divinis nominibus, coherence is achieved through the accumulation of names whose order is neither arbitrary nor strictly systematic. The text advances through a series of conceptual approximations that illuminate the object from different angles without resolving their tensions into a single synthesis. Palamas' *Capita* exhibit a comparable dynamic: coherence arises from the convergence of fragments oriented toward a reality that exceeds conceptual mastery.

It is crucial to emphasise that such coherence is not merely rhetorical or aesthetic. It reflects a philosophical conviction regarding the structure of reality itself. If reality is irreducibly differentiated and cannot be collapsed into a single explanatory principle, then a form of discourse that resists totalisation is not a deficiency but an appropriate response. Discontinuity at the level of form mirrors non-identity at the level of being. The refusal to impose linear continuity thus corresponds to an ontological commitment rather than to a lack of methodological rigor (Lossky 1957; Beierwaltes 1998).

This perspective also clarifies the function of repetition within the *Capita*. Certain themes recur across widely separated chapters, often in slightly altered formulations. Rather than indicating redundancy, such repetition serves to reinforce coherence without synthesis. Each reiteration reframes the theme within a new context, allowing it to be grasped under different aspects. Coherence is thereby distributed across the text rather than concentrated in a single locus. The whole is present not as a summary but as a pattern emerging through recurrence.

Discontinuity also plays a critical epistemological role. By refusing to guide the reader through a predetermined argumentative path, the *Capita* prevent the reduction of understanding to passive reception. The reader must actively participate in the construction of coherence by relating fragments to one another. This demand corresponds to a philosophical conception of knowledge as an act that exceeds mere logical inference. Knowledge is not simply derived, but disclosed through attentive engagement with articulated differences (see Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* IV–VII).

From this standpoint, the coherence of *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* is neither immediate nor imposed. It is achieved through a disciplined exposure to discontinuity that gradually reveals an underlying order without ever exhausting it. The text thus enacts a model of intelligibility in which unity is real but never totalised, and coherence is affirmed without being reduced to system. Such a model challenges the assumption that philosophical rigor requires discursive continuity and suggests instead that rigor may also consist in the controlled suspension of synthesis.

In light of these observations, the structure of the *Capita* cannot be adequately described as fragmentary in a merely negative sense. Discontinuity functions as a constructive principle that enables a distinctive form of coherence—one grounded not in deductive closure but in ontological orientation. The *Capita* articulate a unity that is accessible only through plurality and a coherence that manifests itself precisely through the refusal of linear systematisation. The final section will examine the concept of totality implied by this structure, arguing that *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* embody a philosophical model of totality without system.

Section III: Totality without System: Unity beyond Conceptual Closure

The analysis of discontinuity and coherence in the structure of *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* leads to a more fundamental philosophical question concerning the status of totality. If the text neither unfolds a linear argument nor culminates in a synthetic doctrinal exposition, in what sense

can it be said to articulate a whole at all? The present section argues that the *Capita* embody a model of totality that is irreducible to system, a form of unity that resists conceptual closure while remaining ontologically robust.

In much of the modern philosophical imagination, totality is closely bound to system. To affirm a whole is to organise its parts under a unifying principle, to subordinate multiplicity to conceptual identity, and to render the whole transparent to discursive reason. Such a conception presupposes that intelligibility coincides with exhaustibility: what cannot be fully articulated within a system is deemed incomplete or deficient. Against this background, the *Capita* appear anomalous. They affirm unity without providing a systematic account of it, and they invoke totality without enclosing it within a conceptual framework.

This anomaly, however, dissolves once totality is distinguished from totalisation. The *Capita* do not deny the existence of a whole; rather, they refuse to equate the whole with a system of propositions. Unity is presupposed as real, but it is not rendered identical with any determinate conceptual structure. The whole functions as a horizon of intelligibility rather than as an object of synthesis. Each chapter gestures toward this horizon without claiming to contain it (Palamas, *Capita*, PG 150).

Such a conception of unity finds significant antecedents in Neoplatonic philosophy. In Plotinus, the One is the condition of intelligibility for all multiplicity, yet it is not itself graspable through discursive determination. The unity of being is real and operative, but it remains beyond conceptual enclosure (*Enneads* VI.9). Crucially, this transcendence of the One does not undermine the coherence of the many; rather, it is precisely what allows multiplicity to remain ordered without being collapsed into identity. Unity, in this sense, is not the product of synthesis but the condition under which plurality can appear as intelligible.

Proclus radicalises this insight by articulating a conception of totality that is structurally non-exhaustive. Although the *Elements of Theology* present a seemingly comprehensive account of reality, Proclus explicitly denies that the totality of being can be captured within any finite sequence of propositions. Each theorem articulates a necessary aspect of the whole, yet the whole itself remains irreducible to the sum of its determinations (Proclus 1963; Beierwaltes 1998). Totality is affirmed through a multiplicity of partial articulations, none of which claims finality.

The *Capita* of Gregory Palamas resonate with this philosophical logic while transforming it in a distinctive way. The unity they presuppose is neither an abstract metaphysical principle nor a deductively reconstructed system. It is a unity that manifests itself only through plurality and remains

inaccessible to conceptual mastery. The refusal of systematic closure is not accidental, but corresponds to an ontological stance according to which unity does not abolish difference. To systematise would be to risk identifying unity with sameness and totality with conceptual domination.

This stance becomes particularly evident when one considers the absence of any concluding synthesis in *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*. The text does not culminate in a final definition, summary, or doctrinal consolidation. Instead, it ends as it proceeds: with discrete articulations that remain open to further interpretation. Such an ending is philosophically significant. It signals that totality is not something to be achieved at the end of discourse, but something presupposed throughout without ever being possessed.

From an epistemological perspective, this model of totality implies a fundamental limitation of discursive reason. Knowledge of the whole is not attained through comprehensive representation but through orientation. The reader is not placed in a position of mastery over the object, but is instead situated within a field of intelligibility that exceeds any single act of cognition. This conception aligns closely with the Dionysian insistence that the ultimate object of metaphysical inquiry cannot be grasped through affirmative synthesis but only approached through a disciplined plurality of names and negations (*De divinis nominibus*; Stróżewski 2002).

Importantly, the rejection of conceptual closure does not entail indeterminacy or relativism. The unity affirmed by the *Capita* is not vague or merely symbolic. It exerts a real ordering function, ensuring that the plurality of fragments does not dissolve into incoherence. The coherence of the text depends precisely on the stability of this unity, even though it cannot be rendered fully explicit. Totality is thus neither constructed nor dissolved; it is indicated without being enclosed.

Philosophically, this model challenges the assumption that metaphysical rigor requires systematic completeness. The *Capita* suggest instead that rigor may consist in the controlled refusal of closure, in the maintenance of conceptual tension without resolution. Unity is preserved not by eliminating difference but by allowing difference to remain operative within a shared ontological horizon. In this respect, the text articulates a form of totality that is genuinely non-totalising.

The significance of this model extends beyond the interpretation of Palamas' treatise. It invites a reconsideration of the relationship between form and metaphysical commitment. If reality itself is structured in such a way that unity does not negate plurality, then a fragmentary form of discourse may be more adequate than a systematic one. *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* thus exemplify a philosophical possibility that remains marginal

in modern metaphysics: the articulation of a whole that is real, coherent, and intelligible, yet irreducible to system.

Taken together with the analyses of fragmentary form and structural coherence, this conception of totality allows the *Capita* to be understood as a philosophically rigorous text whose refusal of system is not a deficiency but a deliberate and meaningful choice. Unity beyond conceptual closure emerges here not as a failure of thought, but as a disciplined acknowledgment of the limits of conceptualisation. The concluding section will summarise these findings and outline their implications for the philosophical interpretation of Gregory Palamas' *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has sought to demonstrate that *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* of Gregory Palamas can be fruitfully interpreted as a philosophically rigorous text whose significance lies not only in its doctrinal content but, more fundamentally, in its formal articulation of unity, plurality, and intelligibility. By focusing on the fragmentary structure of the *Capita*, the present study has argued that their form is neither incidental nor merely literary, but constitutive of a distinctive philosophical stance toward totality and system.

Our examination of the fragment as a philosophical form has shown that discontinuity need not imply incoherence—nor does fragmentation necessarily signal the absence of ontological commitment. On the contrary, within the traditions of ancient and late antique philosophy, fragmentary articulation often functions as a disciplined response to the limits of discursive synthesis. In this perspective, the fragment emerges as a positive philosophical instrument, capable of articulating reality without subjecting it to conceptual domination.

The structural analysis of the *Capita* presented here has further clarified how coherence may be achieved without linear continuity. Rather than relying on deductive progression or hierarchical exposition, the text establishes intelligibility through recurrence, resonance, and mutual illumination among autonomous articulations. Coherence is distributed across the plurality of chapters rather than concentrated in a single synthetic locus. This mode of organisation presupposes a whole that is real yet never fully objectified, a horizon of intelligibility that remains operative without being exhaustively represented.

Finally, our discussion of totality without system has shown that *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* articulate a conception of unity that resists conceptual closure without collapsing into indeterminacy. Totality, as implied

by the structure of the text, is neither the sum of its parts nor the product of systematic synthesis. It functions instead as an orienting unity that allows plurality to remain intelligible without being reduced to identity. The refusal of system is thus not a failure of philosophical ambition but an expression of ontological restraint.

Taken together, these analyses suggest that the *Capita* exemplify a philosophical model in which rigor is dissociated from systematic completeness. The text challenges the assumption—dominant in much of modern metaphysics—that intelligibility requires totalisation and that unity must be rendered transparent to discursive reason. Against this assumption, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* propose a form of thought in which unity is affirmed without being enclosed, and coherence is maintained without being totalised.

This model has implications that extend beyond the interpretation of Palamas' treatise. It invites a broader reconsideration of the relationship between philosophical form and metaphysical commitment. If reality itself is structured in such a way that unity does not abolish difference and totality does not coincide with conceptual mastery, then fragmentary forms of articulation may be not only permissible but methodologically appropriate. Philosophical rigor, in this light, consists not in the elimination of tension but in its disciplined maintenance.

The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters thus stand as a philosophically significant example of unity beyond system. Their fragmentary form does not undermine their claim to intelligibility; rather, it enacts a conception of reality in which the whole is real, coherent, and orienting, yet irreducible to any final synthesis. By attending to this form, philosophical interpretation can recover a mode of thinking that remains marginal in modern discourse but is no less rigorous for refusing conceptual closure.

Bibliography

Beierwaltes, Werner. 1998. *Platonismus im Christentum*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

Bradshaw, David. 2004. *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lossky, Vladimir. 1957. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. London: James Clarke.

Louth, Andrew. 2007. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meyendorff, Jean. 1959. *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

—. 1998. A Study of Gregory Palamas. 2nd ed. Translated by G. Lawrence. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Palamas, Gregory. 1865. "Capita physica, theologica, moralia et practica." In *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 150, edited by J.-P. Migne, cols. 1144–1228. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique.

Plotinus. 1966–1988. *Enneads*. Translated by A.H. Armstrong. 7 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Proclus. 1963. *The Elements of Theology*. Edited and translated by E.R. Dodds. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. 1857. "De divinis nominibus." In *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 3, edited by J.-P. Migne, cols. 588–996. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique.

—. 1987. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibhéid. Introduction and notes by Paul Rorem. New York: Paulist Press.

Stróżewski, Władysław. 1955–1957. "Problem panteizmu w De divinis nominibus Pseudo-Dionizego Areopagity." *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 5 (3): 39–59.

—. 2002. "Jedna czy dwie koncepcje Boga? Pseudo-Dionizy Areopagita i św. Tomasz z Akwinu." In *Nauka — religia — dzieje: modele Boga: XI Seminarium w Castel Gandolfo, 7–9 sierpnia 2001*, edited by J. Janik, cols. 123–43. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

Tatakis, Basile. 1949. *La philosophie byzantine*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Between Object and Event
The Iconic Object in Jean-Luc Marion

Ezequiel Murga

Abstract This article proposes the concept of the iconic object as a phenomenological category capable of reconciling givenness and objectivity. Drawing on Jean-Luc Marion's distinction between idol and icon in his early theological works, and between object and event in his phenomenological writings, I argue that not every objectification is metaphysical. Beyond the *a priori* reduction that guarantees certainty by suppressing excess, there is a possible *a posteriori* objectification that recognizes its derivative character and preserves the distance that givenness requires. The iconic object designates precisely this mode of objectification: one that receives the given without exhausting it. The notion finds conceptual support in Marion's "iconic use of concepts" and in Pascal's doctrine of the three orders, which allows for the subordination rather than the abolition of metaphysics. Finally, the article explores how this framework can illuminate various fields such as medicine, education, and ecology.

Keywords event; givenness; hermeneutics; icon; Marion, Jean-Luc; objectification; Pascal, Blaise; phenomenology

✍ Ezequiel Murga, Catholic University of the Most Holy Conception, Chile ✉ ezequiel.murga@ucsc.cl
0000-0003-2567-9067

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 31–46 Subm. 18 December 2025 Acc. 30 December 2025
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043 DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.03

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion has been consistently guided by a critical tension between object and givenness. From his early theological writings on idol and icon, through his phenomenological analyses of saturated phenomena, to his more recent reflections on event, Marion has sought to liberate phenomenality from the hegemony of the metaphysical object. His most decisive move in this regard is the distinction between object and event: the object emerges through a *diminutio phenomenalitatis*—a reduction of intuition that guarantees certainty at the cost of excess, whereas the event saturates intuition and discloses givenness as irreducible to representation (Marion 2020, 194). Yet this framework raises a pressing difficulty: if the object is always the impoverished form of phenomenality, what place remains for the objective mediations of social life—institutions, law, technology, language—without which there is no human world?

Commentators have long noted that this difficulty is tied to a broader shift in Marion's thought. In his early works, the opposition between idol and icon functions as a theological criterion: the idol closes distance by folding the gaze back upon itself, whereas the icon preserves distance by opening the gaze to what cannot be represented (Marion 1995; 2001). In the phenomenological writings, this pair is reconfigured into modalities of saturation: the idol for the category of quality and the icon for that of modality (Marion 2002a; 2002b). This transformation gains in descriptive precision, but loses the critical dimension of the idol/icon opposition. The critical function returns, however, in the second typology of phenomena introduced in *Certitudes négatives*, where Marion (2020) distinguishes objects from events. However, some scholars, such as Christina Gschwandtner, have criticized this shift. In *Degrees of Givenness* (2014), she argues that the second typology forecloses the possibility of gradation: once phenomena are either object or event, impoverished or saturated, there is no room for the nuanced continuum of how things actually give themselves (Gschwandtner 2014, 42). Others stress what is gained. Emmanuel Rogozinski contends that the idol/icon distinction loses its critical force in the phenomenological writings (Marion 2015, 74), while Jorge Roggero (2019) argues that the second typology in fact recovers a critical dimension: by distinguishing object from event, Marion retrieves the capacity to expose when phenomenality is being suppressed.

This article seeks to move beyond this debate by asking whether the dichotomy itself can be nuanced. Not every objectification is metaphysical. One can distinguish between an *a priori* objectification, which imposes the conditions of the subject upon what is given, and an *a posteriori*

one, which operates knowingly as reduction, acknowledging its derivative status and preserving the distance that givenness requires. I call this second modality iconic objectification, and its correlate phenomenon the iconic object.

The notion of the iconic object finds conceptual support in two sources. First, in Marion's own account of the "iconic use of concepts" (Marion 1995, 32), where conceptuality becomes a mediation that signals its own inadequacy rather than enclosing the divine. Second, in Pascal's theory of the three orders, which shows how lower orders may be "doubled" and reoriented by higher ones without being abolished (Marion 2023). Taken together, these resources justify a category capable of reconciling givenness and objectivity without collapsing one into the other.

The aim of this article is thus both critical and constructive. Critically, it sharpens a tension in Marion's phenomenology—its tendency to expel social mediations to the side of the object—by showing that such exclusion is not required. Constructively, it introduces the category of the iconic object as a way of thinking how events can occur in the very midst of social practices. I will therefore first reconstruct Marion's treatment of idol/icon and object/event, before presenting the notion of the iconic object, grounding it phenomenologically, and finally suggesting its fruitfulness in the domains of health, education, and ecology.

Idol and Icon, Object and Event

Marion's early works articulate phenomenality through the polarity of idol and icon. In *God without Being*, he presents them not as superficial opposites—pagan art versus Christian art—but as antagonistic modes of being. The idol is that which suffices to be seen in order to be known: "The idol presents itself to man's gaze in order that representation, and hence knowledge, can seize hold of it" (Marion 1995, 9–10). The gaze makes the idol, not the other way around; it arrests, satisfies, and folds the gaze back upon itself like a mirror reflecting the human measure of the divine. The idol fascinates and dazzles by saturating visibility, allowing the divine to appear only at the scale of man. Historically, this logic carries over into the metaphysical concepts of God.

The icon, by contrast, does not result from a prior act of vision but provokes it. It is not an image of the visible, but of the invisible—from which the visible proceeds and toward which it leads. The icon preserves the invisible intact and manifests it precisely as invisible, exposing the human gaze to an infinite alterity. Unlike the idol, which reproduces a human model of the divine, the icon refers to an origin without original. In the icon, visible

and invisible grow together in a tension that Marion describes as distance: "that union increases in the measure of distinction, and reciprocally." (1995, 23) Whereas the idol divides the invisible—reducing one part to the visible while eclipsing the rest as unthinkable—the icon renders the invisible visible as such, saturating the relation.

This logic applies not only to images but also to concepts. When a concept seeks to comprehend the incomprehensible it becomes an idol; when it renounces domination and disposes itself to receive what exceeds its measure, it can function as an icon. Marion (1995, 23) says:

> Valid as icon is the concept or group of concepts that reinforces the distinction of the visible and the invisible as well as their union, hence that increases the one all the more that it highlights the other. Every pretension to absolute knowledge therefore belongs to the domain of the idol.

Theologically, the icon refers to the invisible face that culminates in Christ's filial self-giving that refers back to the Father. Thus, whereas the idol closes distance by returning the gaze to its own image, the icon opens and inhabits distance, allowing our gaze to be gazed upon by the invisible. As Marion puts it: if the idol is the invisible mirror of our gaze, the icon is the visible mirror of the invisible.

Marion (2004) revisits the relation between idol and icon from the horizon of aesthetics and art. He distinguishes two possible regimes of crossing between the visible and the invisible. The first—classical—one is where the invisible exerts itself upon the visible by means of perspective, under the logic of intentional objectivity. The second—less common—one is where the invisible acts directly upon the gaze, freeing it from the structure of spectatorship and even calling into question the status of the "I" who looks. Here Marion identifies the possibility of "the invisible *in* the visible." (Marion 2004, 20) Analyzing *White Square on White Background*, he describes it as a "non-objective phenomenon": "we must learn to see the canvas as the presence of a nonobject, which nevertheless shares the complete visibility of objects" (Marion 2004, 21). The icon belongs to this second regime: it is not produced but received; it does not fulfill the expectation of the viewer but educates the gaze to see differently. Within this logic, Marion opposes the icon to the idol. The idol fulfills the expectations of desire, even if in surprising ways; the icon, by contrast, exceeds every anticipation, "drives desire mad," and annuls foresight. The idol is an invisible mirror delimiting what the gaze can bear; the icon, by contrast, opens a horizon in which what is given belongs neither to artist nor spectator. The true painting—and here

Marion includes the icon—arises from its own necessity, produces itself, and requires of the painter a receptive passivity capable of letting forms impose themselves from an invisible ground.

Against the logic of the market, which reintegrates the artwork into the regime of objects, Marion proposes the icon as an alternative model of the image: not a pictorial genre but a doctrine of visibility. In the icon one passes from the dyad gaze–object to the triad gaze–object–prototype, and what is distinctive of the icon is that in it I know myself to be seen:

> Icon here designates a doctrine concerning the visibility of the image, more exactly, concerning the usage of this visibility. This doctrine is characterized, in summary, by two radical innovations.
>
> For the duo (or duel) of a spectator's gaze, objectively visible, it [the doctrine of the icon] substitutes a third: a spectator's gaze, objectively visible, but also a prototype. The prototype does not only play the role, at first here, finally very banal, of an original (mimetically reproduced by the objectively visible), of a referent (possibly inaccessible), or of a phantom from the nether world [l'arrière-monde]; it does not intervene as a second visible, behind the first, concealed by the first mimetic objectivity—uncontrollable, unusable, indefinitely repeatable; it intervenes as a second gaze that, as through the transpierced screen of the first visible (the painted or sculpted image, etc.), envisages the first visage, that of the gazing spectator. Before the profane image, I remain the viewer unseen by an image that is reduced to the rank of an object (the aesthetic object remains an object) constituted, at least in part, by my gaze. Before the icon, if I continue to look, I feel myself seen (I must feel myself thus in order for it to function effectively as an icon). Thus the image no longer creates a screen (or, as in the case of the idol, a mirror), since through it and under its features another gaze—invisible like all gazes—envisages me. (Marion 2004, 59)

This structure finds its extreme figure in the cross: a type that does not reproduce its prototype by resemblance, but designates it paradoxically, opening up an abyss between appearance and glory.

What is decisive at this first stage is that distance has a triadic character: it unfolds in the relation between the I who looks, the visible object, and the invisible prototype. The icon is never a mere image; it is a mediation that keeps open the gap between the painted face and the invisible face of Christ. The idol, by contrast, reduces this triad to a closed duality: the I and the object in mirror, without remainder. Marion thematizes this difference

as a critical stance against the metaphysics of presence: the idol fixes, the icon displaces. And it does so through distance, which functions as a hermeneutical criterion of discernment.

When Marion turns to phenomenology—particularly in *Being Given* and *In Excess*—the term distance ceases to occupy a central place and is frequently replaced by *écart* (gap). This terminological change, however, does not imply the disappearance of the motif, but its reconfiguration. *Écart* designates the irreducible difference between givenness and manifestation, between call and response, between what is given and what shows itself. Distance thus becomes a phenomenological principle: givenness cannot be reduced to full visibility, but always gives itself "in excess," beyond the intuition that receives it: "The givenness opens the gap between what shows itself and what is given. This gap—or perhaps this distance—can never and must never be annulled or forgotten. All that remains is to traverse it" (Marion 2016, 15–16; my translation).

It is important to emphasize that this reconfiguration also alters the status of the icon. In the phenomenology of saturated phenomena, the icon no longer functions in the triadic key of Marion's early writings (gaze–image–prototype), but is concentrated in the relation itself: the face of the other, which exerts a counter-intentionality upon the self, obliging it to become witness. Distance is no longer played out primarily in sensible visibility (image/prototype), but in the asymmetry of the intersubjective relation. The icon becomes the "irregardable": "there is no visible or assignable intuition," "there is nothing to see," "nobody has ever seen it" (Marion 2002a, 232–33). Similarly, in *In Excess*, the face does not manifest itself and never communicates its meaning:

> When it envisages me, it does not manifest itself. Or if it manifests itself—because in envisaging me, one can also say that it manifests itself from itself, starting from itself and insofar as itself, more than any other phenomenon manages to do so—it does not nevertheless ever say its meaning. (Marion 2002b, 121)

The idol, for its part, no longer designates the rival of the icon in the theological register, but a type of saturation. The initial critical opposition thereby loses force, and distance shifts registers: no longer a theological criterion of discernment, but a phenomenological structure of givenness.

The consequence is ambivalent. On the one hand, phenomenological rigor is gained: distance no longer depends on theological representation, but on the very structure of appearing. On the other hand, part of the critical

function that the idol/icon opposition carried in the early works is lost. The task is no longer to denounce idolatry as the closure of distance, but to describe the variety of ways in which givenness exceeds intuition. This explains Rogozinski's reading: in *Being Given*, the idol/icon distinction seems to dissolve, losing its critical edge (Marion 2015, 74). Yet, as Roggero (2019, 128) observes,

> Rogozinski is right to point out this modification in the status of the critical opposition between idol and icon. Nevertheless, it is not true that the critical dimension loses all relevance in the phenomenological works. The critique of the perspectival procedure of objectification—proper to the idol within the metaphysical regime—remains, albeit in a more attenuated form, as a critique of the limitations of the a priori conceptual framework in poor and common-law phenomena, and it is reinforced in the distinction between object and event introduced in *Certitudes négatives*.

At this level, the opposition reappears: between what closes distance and what keeps it open.

In the second topic pertaining to phenomena, Jean-Luc Marion establishes a decisive distinction between object and event. This opposition crystallizes what was already implicit in his earlier writings: the tension between objectivity and givenness, between reduction and eventiality. The object does not arise as one phenomenon among others, but as the result of an *a priori* reduction of the event. In Marion's (2020, 194) words, "its objectification is the result of a phenomenal restriction, and this *diminutio phenomenalitatis* assures it certainty only by masking, or even by almost suppressing in it its originary event-characteristic." The security offered by the object comes at the price of a loss: what shows itself is diminished in its original excess.

Thus, Marion can affirm that "the object constitutes the impoverished figure of phenomenality, impoverished because diminished in intuition, contrary to the event, which is a phenomenon saturated with intuition" (2020, 195). Object and event are not two types of beings, but two extreme modes of appearing: the object, reduced to what can be actively constituted by consciousness; the event, exceeding all anticipation and abandoning us to possibilities we could never have foreseen prior to its irruption. Hence Marion emphasizes that the object proceeds from vision, while the event precedes it: objectivity is founded on what I can already grasp, whereas the event surprises me from an unforeseen future and demands of me a response. Here we note the importance of the *a priori* character that object-constitution has for Marion: it consists in imposing objective conditions in advance, *a priori*.

In this sense, the opposition between object and event is inseparable from the question of predictability. The object presents itself as what is calculable, available, reproducible. The event, by contrast, occurs without guarantees, precipitating reality toward what had not yet occurred and can never be repeated identically. The essential point is that it exceeds me, does not allow itself to be reduced to mere representation, and retroactively redefines the very horizon of the thinkable. This opposition must also be considered in relation to the thing. For Marion, the object does not coincide with the thing: it replaces it. The thing resists reduction, shows itself from itself, whereas the object is a constituted double, alienated by a process of dematerialization aimed at securing certainty. The object no longer appears "in itself and by itself," but as a residue of intelligibility, relative to a power of knowing that renders it dependent upon consciousness. The thing, by contrast, resists, because in it an irreducible "yes" is affirmed (Marion 2016, 171–77).

At this point the following question becomes critical: must every phenomenon necessarily be constituted as an object? Is objecthood the exclusive horizon of what is given? Marion shows that tradition—from Kant to Husserl—has closed off this question, reducing even non-objective phenomena to an exteriority of theoretical reason. The object thus emerges as a hegemonic horizon, guaranteeing certainty at the cost of stifling the possibility that something might show itself from itself, outside the conditions of objectification. In contrast, the event discloses another temporality. Whereas the object is given in the stability of the present, the event precipitates toward the future, constantly arriving as that which had not already been given. Its constancy is not that of repetition, but of incessant change. The object shows little because it receives little; the event gives itself without ceasing and therefore never finishes showing itself. Hence, its intelligibility does not reside in immediate certainty but in the consequences it unfolds, in the retrospective hermeneutics it demands.

Marion (2016, 185) can therefore affirm: "the saturation of certain phenomena must be understood as the formal consequence of their phenomenality according to the measure of givenness." The event, as saturated phenomenon, reveals the insufficiency of objecthood and opens the possibility of thinking phenomenality beyond the object.

This distinction between object and event seems to reprise the antagonistic relation once borne by idol and icon. Now it is the object that conceals the distance between what is given and what appears, while the event acknowledges it and—in a certain sense—phenomenalizes it. As Roggero (2019) suggests, this allows a critical dimension to reemerge. It also opens

up an ethical dimension to the phenomenology of givenness, where what is at stake is the need for a hermeneutical discernment capable of deciding the most just way to phenomenalize what is given.[1]

Yet here a difficulty arises. The difference that Marion establishes between icon and object seems to foreclose the possibility of an iconic relation at the very heart of social life. The worker, the employee, the citizen—all seem condemned to objectification. The face of the other, once it enters a framework of economic or institutional exchange, ceases to be face and becomes object:

> All the same, when the other person finds him-or-herself identified by a professional or social role (technician, notary, doctor, teacher, judge, and so on), no doubt he or she benefits from a definition and I can assign to the other a meaning; I can even consider that the person's conduct and words express this meaning. But straightaway the other disappears as a face: I cease to envisage him or her as a face, because I have no need of it in order to behave toward the other; he or she does not, besides, expect this much, and asks only to be recognized according to function and profession, which is what I most certainly do. Our reciprocal inauthenticity assures social relations very well, which standardization and effectiveness require, which anonymity guarantees. (Marion 2002b, 121)

If we follow Marion at this point, there appear to be only two options: either the invisibility of the face, or the violence of a metaphysical objectification that reduces the other to a mere social role.

But is that the only alternative? Should we not think a form of objectification that is not necessarily metaphysical but derivative, secondary, even legitimate? In other words, is an *a posteriori* objectification possible which, far from suppressing givenness, begins from it and acknowledges it as its foundation? Perhaps the problem does not lie in objectification itself, but in the way it is conceived: either as an *a priori* condition that closes off all appearing, or as an *a posteriori* reduction that, while simplifying what is given, preserves the memory of what exceeds it. The problem, however, persists: is the object always condemned to annul distance? Is it not possible to think an objectification which, instead of erasing the excess, recognizes

1. Regarding the need for hermeneutical discernment in Marion's work, Tamsin Jones (2011) proposes to draw on Gregory of Nyssa's hermeneutical model in order to complement Marion's phenomenology. Steinbock (2007a), for his part, while rejecting the term hermeneutics in favor of discernment, appeals to the discernment of spirits from the Christian religious tradition as a possible framework. Roggero (2020), in turn, develops his criteria following Romano. I have addressed this question in my article *El discernimiento hermenéutico en Jean-Luc Marion.* (2022)

and safeguards it? If distance is the nerve of phenomenality, then it should not be the exclusive monopoly of the icon-event. This is the turning point: to think the possibility of an iconic object—that is, an objectification which maintains distance within itself rather than suppressing it.

THE ICONIC OBJECT

Up to this point, we have seen how distance operates in Marion's thought, both in his early theological phase and in his phenomenological turn. In both moments, however, a binary association seems to persist: on one side, the icon (or the event) as guarantor of distance; on the other, the idol (or the object) as its suppression. This symmetry provides critical clarity but risks becoming a rigid dichotomy that prevents us from thinking the complexity of social life. If accepted without qualification, this opposition implies that every form of objectification inevitably reduces the other to an object, closing off distance and cancelling the possibility of an iconic relation. Within such a framework, the worker, the patient, the student, and even the interlocutor in an institutional context would always appear under the sign of idolatry—condemned to be objects of function, exchange, or calculation. The only alternative would seem to be the exceptional encounter with the face: an event that breaks with the social order and exceeds it.

This reading leaves an unsettling void. If social life as such were essentially idolatrous, no space would remain for mediations capable of preserving distance, even under objective forms. Yet Marion himself provides the resources for overcoming this impasse. At the end of *Being Given*, in his discussion of abandonment, he acknowledges that social life necessarily involves objectifications—anonymity, interchangeability, efficiency of exchange. If every saturated phenomenon were to impose itself in its absolute excess, common existence would become impossible. Objectification, therefore, cannot simply be abolished; it is a necessary condition of everyday dwelling (Marion 2002a, 318–19).

The question, then, is not whether to objectify, but how and when:

> When confronted with this phenomenon, it is a question of seeing whether I can describe it as an object (a common-law phenomenon whose intuition is contained within the concept) or whether I must describe it as a saturated phenomenon (whose intuition exceeds the concept). (Marion 2008, 136)

The issue concerns the modality of objectification rather than its mere existence. Can there be a form of objectification that recognizes its derivative character, that knows itself as reduction and takes responsibility for

what it leaves out? In other words, can there be an *a posteriori* objectification—conscious of its own limitation, open to distance, and therefore non-metaphysical?[2]

This possibility leads to the introduction of the notion of the iconic object. Unlike the metaphysical object—closed, self-sufficient, and guaranteed by certainty and geometric order—the iconic object arises from the recognition that objectification does not exhaust givenness, but receives it under a limited form, conscious of the distance that constitutes it. It is an object that, instead of closing off excess, points toward it—that, instead of absorbing the gaze within its certainty, diverts it toward what overflows. What is decisive is that distance remains open. The iconic object does not replace the event, but neither does it annul it: it houses the event within social mediations, recognizing the limitation inherent in all objectification and avoiding the tyranny of the subject.

In this sense, the iconic object can be phenomenologically justified by analogy with the iconic use of the concept that Marion develops in *God without Being*. There, Marion (1995) distinguishes between a metaphysical concept—which seeks to enclose the divine within the logic of being—and an iconic concept, which recognizes its own limits and knows itself as mediation, opening itself to what exceeds it:

> as the idol can exercise its measure of the divine by concept, since the gaze as well can invisibly reflect its own aim and in it dismiss the *invisible,* the icon also can proceed conceptually, provided at least that the concept renounce comprehending the incomprehensible, to attempt to conceive it, hence also receive it, in its own excessiveness. (Marion 1995, 22–23)

In a similar way, the iconic object does not enclose what is given within the certainty of its objectification, but keeps open the distance toward the excess that constitutes it. The triadic character of the icon (gaze–visible–prototype) allows the object to be understood as a transparent mediation which, instead of absorbing the gaze, redirects it elsewhere. For this reason, objectification is legitimate insofar as it occurs *a posteriori*, acknowledging that the phenomenon itself authorizes and suggests the mode of its

2. Steinbock (2007b), rightly in my view, distinguishes between "poor phenomenon proper"—mathematical and logical phenomena that are given with a poverty of intuition—and "denigrated phenomenon," which result from the objectification of a saturated phenomenon. The question that guides my work is whether every objectification of a saturated phenomenon necessarily entails a "denigration," or whether it is possible to conceive of a modality of objectification that favors the phenomenon itself.

objectification—a mode that is partial, provisional, and derived. In this key, the practice of anamorphosis reveals that, at times, the place where the invisible shows itself most clearly is precisely the object, provided that it is understood in iconic terms—as a visible mirror of the invisible. In this sense, the iconic object realizes the possibility, opened up by Marion, of a mixed phenomenon: "the pure event (if there is one) and the pure object (if there is one) setting forth its two extreme poles, between which there extends the prism of all other phenomena, however degraded or mixed" (Marion 2020, 194).

Pascal and the Iconic Object

The proposal of the iconic object finds a decisive ally in Pascal's schema of the three orders. This framework shows how there can be a legitimate, even necessary, use of the elements of a lower order in the service of a higher one—provided they are not absolutized or closed in upon themselves.

Marion (1999) treats this schema in detail in *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes*, where he employs it to show a path of internal overcoming of metaphysics within the history of philosophy. The key to this architectonic lies in the fact that each order is constituted through a transgression of the preceding one. It is neither a closed nor a continuous system: the radical heterogeneity between the orders precludes any attempt at univocal systematization. The first order corresponds to the sensible and material; the second, to reason and evidence—the domain of metaphysics; the third, to charity. Each order possesses its own internal logic, its own "greatnesses," and its own criteria of judgment. The transgression that opens each new order does not annul the previous one but relativizes it. Marion thus interprets *Pensées* §308 as a structure that allows one to surpass Cartesian metaphysics from within its own unfolding.

Each order, according to Marion (2008), functions as both a heuristic and a hermeneutical principle—heuristic, because it renders visible phenomena inaccessible to the lower orders; hermeneutical, because it reinterprets already known phenomena. Here the metaphor of the gaze becomes central: each order allows one to see with different eyes: "Charity no longer intervenes as the pious and superfluous auxiliary to the passion of love; it opens a distinct world by opening other eyes in man." (Marion 1999, 313) For this reason, although the orders are incommensurable, they are linked hierarchically: the higher judges the lower, but not vice versa. This hierarchy maintains continuity between orders without collapsing into homogeneity: "each order suffices unto itself—at least it appears to in its own eyes—governs the inferior, and dispenses with any superior" (Marion 1999, 315).

To clarify this structure, Marion (1981) turns to Descartes's theory of code. Descartes conceives of sensations as effects of intelligible figures encoded by nature. Between effect (sensation) and cause (figure) there intervenes a code, which Marion calls "(de-)figuration." In the *First Meditation*, Cartesian doubt introduces an over-code that disrupts the equivalence between perception and truth, but which is later neutralized by the divine guarantee of veracity. Marion proposes that in Pascal the over-code is the product not of a malign genius but of divine charity. The key difference lies in the fact that for Descartes evidence is insuperable, whereas Pascal introduces a different parameter, charity, which displaces evidence as the ultimate criterion. The distance between the second and third orders is sustained by the distance between their parameters: evidence or charity.

This displacement is not without consequence. When an order attempts to judge another according to its own criteria, tyranny ensues. Pascal defines tyranny as "the universal desire to dominate beyond one's order." (Pascal 2004, 18) In this sense, Pascal—and Marion with him—does not criticize metaphysics *per se*, but rather its pretension to dominate realms that transcend it. Charity may judge metaphysics, but not the reverse. This judgment of the third order over the lower ones appears in §694 of the *Pensées*, where Pascal acknowledges the formal validity of geometry and metaphysics but denounces their uselessness from the perspective of the higher order:

> Order. — I could well have taken this discourse in an order like this, to show the vanity of all sorts of conditions: to show the vanity of ordinary lives, and then the vanity of philosophical lives, skeptic or stoic. But the order would not have been kept. I know a bit about it, and how few people understand it. No human science can keep it. Saint Thomas did not keep it. Mathematics keeps it, but it is useless its depths. (Pascal 2004, 173)

The same applies to the metaphysical proofs of God's existence: they are true, yet ineffective. Vincent Carraud (1992, 380) summarizes this point: "Although correct, the metaphysical proofs are disqualified, null, and without value for the gaze of the third order—the only one that matters, that of charity."

The iconic object situates itself precisely within this logic. It does not deny objectification—proper to the order of minds and to conceptual rationality—but places it in the service of a greater openness. It is an *a posteriori* objectification in which the object is recognized as already given and yet reinterpreted within the horizon of excess. Following Carraud's (1992)

interpretation, Pascal himself shows how concepts belonging to the second order (the proofs of God's existence, the calculus of partition, infinity) can be used and subverted within the third order, becoming apologetic resources without being reduced to their metaphysical origin. Something analogous occurs with the iconic object: its objectification belongs, strictly speaking, to the second order, but when interpreted from the perspective of charity it ceases to be tyrannical and becomes hospitable to what surpasses it.

The category of distance helps to specify this movement. In Pascal, each order is separated from the others by an incommensurable distance: spirit cannot be founded on body, nor charity on spirit. The iconic object preserves this distance, for it does not confuse object with event. Iconic objectification does not erase distance, but turns it into the very site of givenness.

Thus Pascal provides a fundamental hermeneutical key: the iconic object does not represent a return to metaphysics, or a naïve concession to objectivism, but rather the possibility of using objectification as a resource within a broader horizon, without losing its subordinate character. The notion of "doubling" metaphysics becomes here the principle that phenomenologically justifies the legitimacy of the iconic object (Marion, 2023).

Applications of the Iconic Object

I would like to highlight three domains in which I consider the use of the concept of the iconic object to be particularly fruitful.

(1) Health: the patient as iconic object. In medical practice, the patient often oscillates between two poles: being reduced to a mere biological object (the body as a machine to be repaired), or being exalted abstractly as pure subjectivity (the autonomous patient as sovereign decision-maker). The notion of the iconic object breaks this polarity. The patient's body can and must be objectified—through clinical tests, diagnoses, and protocols—but that objectification can remain open to an excess that surpasses it: the irreducible dignity of the suffering person, their biography, their vulnerability. Such an *a posteriori* objectification allows for a medicine that, without renouncing science, keeps alive a posture of hospitality toward the suffering of the other.

(2) Education: the student as iconic object. A similar tension arises in education. The student cannot be reduced to a "human resource" or a mere mind that accumulates information, but neither can they be left within the romantic void of a pure subjectivity without demands or structures. The student manifests as an iconic object insofar as pedagogical devices (content, evaluation, methods) function as necessary objectifications that remain open to an excess—the mystery of learning, creative freedom, and

the capacity for independent thought. The iconic object enables a pedagogy that integrates objectification and transcendence, technique and openness.

(3) Ecology: nature as iconic object. In ecology, the tension lies between a nature understood as an object of exploitation and a nature divinized, untouchable, inaccessible. The concept of the iconic object offers an alternative: nature is indeed objectifiable—measurable, transformable, usable—but always within a distance that leaves room for its excess: its mystery, its beauty, its given character. Iconic objectification thus prevents both extractivism and naïve sacralism, proposing instead a relation of care that recognizes nature as a gift that presents itself in the form of an object, but is never reducible to it.

Conclusion

The iconic object designates a phenomenological figure capable of reconciling givenness and objectivity without collapsing one into the other. It preserves the openness of distance within the very process of objectification, allowing the phenomenon to be received without being reduced. Whereas metaphysical objectification imposes *a priori* the conditions of the subject, the iconic object arises *a posteriori*, as a responsible reduction that knows itself as limited and derivative. In this way, it reconfigures the space between event and object, between excess and form, as a field of phenomenological discernment.

The notion thus allows us to think how givenness can inhabit the very structures of social life—medicine, education, ecology—without being exhausted by them. It also invites further development: each of these domains could be deepened, and others explored, such as politics, aesthetics, and digital culture, where the tension between event and object becomes newly urgent.

At a more reflexive level, Marion's own phenomenology can itself be understood as an iconic object. His conceptual apparatus—givenness, saturated phenomenon, *adonné*, distance—constitutes a form of objectification that does not close off the gift but keeps open the space of its excess. His philosophy, then, exemplifies what it describes: a conceptual construction that points beyond itself, a visible mirror of the invisible.

In this sense, the iconic object not only names a category within phenomenology but also functions as a method and a stance: it teaches us to see phenomena, institutions, and even concepts as mediations that, when rightly received, can reflect the excess of givenness without appropriating it. The task ahead is to continue exploring how such iconic objectifications might sustain the possibility of a world that remains open to the gift.

REFERENCES

Carraud, Vincent. 1992. *Pascal et la philosophie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Gschwandtner, Christina M. 2014. *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Jones, Tamsin. 2011. *A Genealogy of Marion's Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Marion, Jean-Luc. 1981. *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes: Analogie, création des vérités éternelles*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

—. 1995. *God without Being: Hors-Texte*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—. 1999. *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—. 2001. *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. New York: Fordham University Press.

—. 2002a. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

—. 2002b. *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. Translated by Robyn Horner. New York: Fordham University Press.

—. 2004. *The Crossing of the Visible*. Translated by James K.A. Smith. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

—. 2008. *The Visible and the Revealed*. Translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner. New York: Fordham University Press.

—. 2015. *Ce que nous voyons et ce qui apparaît*. Bry-sur-Marne: INA.

—. 2016. *Reprise du donné*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

—. 2020. *Negative Certainties*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—. 2023. *La métaphysique et après: essais sur l'historicité et sur les époques de la philosophie*. Paris: Bernard Grasset.

Murga, Ezequiel Daniel. 2022. "El discernimiento hermenéutico en Jean-Luc Marion." *Revista de Filosofía* 47 (2): 455-470. https://doi.org/10.5209/resf.71121

Pascal, Blaise. 2004. *Pensées*. Translated by Roger Ariew. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Roggero, Jorge Luis. 2019. *Hermenéutica del amor: La fenomenología de La donación de Jean-Luc Marion en diálogo con la fenomenología del joven Heidegger*. Buenos Aires: SB Editorial.

—. 2020. "Los Cuatro Niveles de Hermenéutica En La Fenomenología de J.-L. Marion." *Revista de Filosofía* 45 (1): 141–60. https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/resf.61389.

Steinbock, Anthony J. 2007a. *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

—. 2007b. "The Poor Phenomenon: Marion and the Problem of Givenness." *Alter: Revue de Phénoménologie* 15: 7–21.

Proof as Sign, Conversion as Condition

A Lonerganian Meta-Apologetics After *Insight* 19

Steven Umbrello

Abstract Lonergan's chapter 19 "proof," in *Insight*, for God is typically assessed as a putative demonstration whose success rises or falls with the minor premise that "the real is completely intelligible." Yet both the structure of Insight (proof as a "set of signs" requiring the reader's self-performance of rational judgment) and Lonergan's later methodological turn (proof presupposes a horizon that cannot itself be proved) suggest that the apologetically decisive contribution of *Insight* 19 is not a freestanding inference but a meta-apologetic, that is, an account of the normative conditions under which any natural-theological proof can function as evidence. This article argues that Lonergan offers a two-level model of apologetic rationality. On the first level, proofs function as instruments of clarification and as invitations to grasp a virtually unconditioned. On the second level, their cogency is conditioned immediately by intellectual conversion and, in the later Lonergan, within the fuller horizon shaped by moral and religious conversion. Interpreted this way, *Insight* 19 is not discarded by later Lonergan but re-situated. It becomes a diagnostic and constructive tool within method, capable of exposing counterpositions and stabilizing conversion, without pretending to generate a horizon *ex nihilo*.

Keywords Lonergan, Bernard; meta-apologetics; proof of God; rationality

✍ Steven Umbrello, University of Turin, Italy ✉ steven.umbrello@unito.it 🆔 0000-0002-4798-2115

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 47–67
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043
Subm. 24 February 2026 Acc. 27 March 2026
DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.04

INTRODUCTION

One can read chapter nineteen of *Insight* in two very different ways (Lonergan 1992, 657–708). The first way looks for a proof in the ordinary sense. It looks for premises that force a conclusion. It then asks whether the premises are true and whether the inference is valid. The second way looks for something more basic than a proof. It looks for a shift in the subject. It asks what happens in consciousness when one moves from understanding to judgment, from mere conception to reasonable affirmation. Lonergan wrote the chapter in the context of a much larger project, a project aimed at self-appropriation. St. Amour puts the latter criticism sharply, quoting Lonergan, who judged that the "trouble with chapter nineteen" lay in its failure to depart from the traditional line and in its tendency to treat God's existence and attributes "in a purely objective fashion" (Lonergan 2004, 172).[1]

Recent discussion of Lonergan's chapter nineteen has tended to follow three broad paths. Reconstructive readers such as Bernard Tyrrell and Robert Spitzer seek to restate the proof in a more explicit argumentative form (Tyrrell 1974; Spitzer 2014). Critical readers such as Ronald Hepburn and Louis Dupré question either the warrant for the complete intelligibility premise or the transition from unrestricted inquiry to transcendent reality (Dupré 1972, 131–45). Mediating readers such as Luboš Rojka and Paul St. Amour do not deny the formal importance of the proof, but insist that its force depends upon the subject's appropriation of Lonergan's positions on knowing, being, and objectivity (Rojka 2008, 31–49).

This paper accepts the descriptive accuracy of these diagnoses, but it shifts the object of evaluation. It asks a different question. It asks what Lonergan offers apologetics when one takes seriously two claims that the tradition often holds apart. First, Lonergan insists that proof as printed argument does not itself yield judgment. The pages offer signs. The reader must perform the immanent act of rational consciousness. Second, Lonergan later insists that proof in any serious meaning presupposes a system, and that the system presupposes a horizon that belongs to a culture and a history. Hence, one cannot prove a horizon.

If both claims stand, then apologetics changes. It does not die. It changes its aim. It ceases to promise what it cannot deliver, namely, the production of a horizon through argument alone. It can still do something real. It can clarify meanings and it can uncover counterpositions. And we should not underplay its value in inviting the reader to test his or her own orientation

1. Also cited in St. Amour 2010, 10.

to inquiry. St. Amour makes this "wide-open" character explicit when saying that the argument may be valid, but existentially it remains open, since one's judgment about the premises depends on who one is and on whether the minor premise becomes a matter of real assent (St. Amour 2010, 23).

That is the center of gravity of this article. I argue that Lonergan offers a meta-apologetic. By that I mean an account of the normative conditions under which any natural theological proof can function as evidence for a subject. That account has two levels. On the first, argument functions as a sign that points toward a virtually unconditioned judgment. On the second, the horizon of the subject conditions whether the sign can function as a sign, whether it can have meaning, and whether it can be valued as worth pursuing. Conversion enters here. But it does not enter as a cheap escape from criticism. Nor does it enter as an excuse to dismiss disagreement. Better yet, it enters as a name for the way in which the subject's horizon changes, and with it the subject's ability to grasp principles and not merely conclusions. For the purposes of chapter nineteen, the proximate issue is intellectual conversion. Moral and religious conversion become decisive when the later Lonergan broadens the question from formal proof to the concrete horizon within which proof acquires meaning and value.

The paper proceeds in six steps. I begin by showing why "Does the proof work?" is not the right first question in Lonerganian terms. I then anchor the argument in Lonergan's own insistence that proof on paper supplies signs, and that judgment requires a grasp of the unconditioned. I then turn to the later Lonergan, largely through St. Amour's careful synthesis, to show why Lonergan came to claim that proof is not fundamental and that one cannot prove a horizon. I then propose a constructive framework for a Lonerganian meta-apologetics that integrates the two claims. I follow this by then testing the framework by re-reading the famous minor premise, the claim that the real is completely intelligible, as a diagnostic for positions and counterpositions rather than as a premise to be defended in abstraction. I close by indicating what this contributes to apologetics and to Lonergan studies.

Throughout, I keep the argument close to the texts. I do not pretend to settle every metaphysical dispute about the complete intelligibility of reality. That dispute matters. It is not my primary object. I aim instead to show that Lonergan's own methodological remarks shift the nature of what apologetics can responsibly claim.

Preliminary Clarifications

Before turning to the proof itself, several Lonerganian terms require clarification. By the heuristic notion of being, I mean not an image of some highest object, but the objective intended by the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know. Hence, Lonergan defines being as what is to be known by correct understanding and affirmed by reasonable judgment. This definition is heuristic because it specifies the relation between cognitional operations and their objective without pretending to picture being directly. For the same reason, the claim that the real is being is not an arbitrary stipulation. Instead, it is but a consequence of Lonergan's correlation of meaning with intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation.

Judgment, accordingly, is not the mere attachment of existence to a concept. Direct insight grasps intelligibility. Reflective insight grasps that the relevant conditions are fulfilled. Only then does judgment occur as assent grounded in the virtually unconditioned. The distinction matters throughout what follows, because the chapter nineteen proof is not a slide from concepts to existence but best read as a transition from understanding to reflective grasp and then to judgment.

A horizon, in Lonergan's later sense, is the historically and culturally formed field within which meanings are available, arguments are intelligible, and goals appear worth pursuing. It would therefore be erroneous to conceptualise these as a mere mood or as a merely private standpoint. It is part of the subject's equipment if the subject is to understand the terms, grasp the validity of the argument, and value the investigation. In the present context, the relevant horizon includes intellectual conversion and, ordinarily, a theoretical differentiation of consciousness, that is, the ability to operate in the intellectual pattern of experience with systematic control of meaning rather than remaining confined to common-sense imagery and spontaneous realism (Lonergan 2004, 172).

Conversion, in the later Lonergan, is a radical revision of horizon. Intellectual conversion concerns one's basic account of knowing and objectivity (2017, 223). Moral conversion concerns the shift from satisfactions to values (2017, 225–26). Religious conversion concerns being in love in an unrestricted fashion (2017, 226–27). In the vocabulary of *Insight*, the positions are affirmed when one accepts one's own intelligence and reasonableness and stands by that acceptance. Counterpositions arise when other desires interfere with the proper functioning of the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know (Lonergan 1992, 696). Their "reversal" is not an arbitrary change of mind but the recognition that a counterposition defeats itself once it is claimed to be grasped intelligently and affirmed reasonably.

"Does the Proof Work?" Is the Wrong First Question

When one asks whether Lonergan's proof works, one normally means something precise. One means whether the conclusion follows from the premises and whether the premises are true. That question matters. And, as such, it is not illegitimate to pose. Yet it is not the first question that Lonergan's text demands. Lonergan's project aims at self-appropriation. It aims at making explicit the operations by which we come to know anything at all. It also aims at showing how mistaken accounts of knowing lead to distorted metaphysics and distorted views of objectivity. In that context, a printed argument has a different status. It does not function as a tool that substitutes for the reader's insight and judgment. Better yet, it functions as an invitation to perform them.

Do not mistake this as a rhetorical flourish. Lonergan states the point in chapter nineteen itself. Proof is not an automatic process like a physiological reaction or a mechanical computation. The page gives signs. The reader must grasp the virtually unconditioned and must judge. He says:

> proof is not some automatic process that results in a judgment, as taking an aspirin relieves a headache, or as turning on a switch sets the digital computer on its unerring way. All that can be set down in these pages is a set of signs. The signs can represent a relevant virtually unconditioned. But grasping it and making the consequent judgment is an immanent act of rational consciousness that each has to perform for himself and no one else can perform for him. (Lonergan 1992, 695)

This claim has immediate consequences. It means that a critic who treats the proof as if it were a self-moving machine will misread it. It also means that a defender who treats it as a device that should compel assent, regardless of the reader's horizon, will also misread it.

One sees one type of contemporary restatement in Robert Spitzer's pedagogical reconstruction of a Lonerganian proof for God's existence. My concern here is not to adjudicate Spitzer's broader apologetic project in detail, but to note a methodological point. Once Lonergan's argument is restated in compressed, publicly apologetic form, the distinctively cognitional route of chapter nineteen can recede from view unless its underlying presuppositions are kept explicit (Spitzer 2014).[2]

2. Spitzer's fuller treatment is more nuanced than a short public summary can show and does explicitly discuss Lonergan's notion of being. My point here is therefore not that Spitzer ignores that notion, but that compressed apologetic restatements can obscure Lonergan's own cognitional route when detached from its underlying presuppositions. (see Spitzer 2010)

One sees the misreading also in some philosophical critiques. Dupré formalizes Lonergan's argument in much the same way that a defender would, then he grants the internal coherence of the conditional chain, and then he targets the crucial move (Dupré 1972, 143). He targets the attempt to answer Kant by appealing to the fact of an unlimited desire to know, and he denies that such a fact implies the ultimate intelligibility of the real. Dupré's objection presses hard. It deserves attention. Yet even here, one can ask whether the objection strikes Lonergan's decisive claim or whether it strikes one way of reading that claim. If one treats Lonergan as arguing from desire to a metaphysical fact about the world, then Dupré has a clear target. If one treats Lonergan as arguing about the conditions of reasonable affirmation and objectivity, then the target shifts. The question becomes whether our very practice of judgment and inquiry already commits us, not to a finished metaphysical system, but to a demand for intelligibility that cannot coherently be denied while one claims to know.

This points toward a more accurate first question. One should ask what the argument asks of the reader. One should ask what operations the argument presupposes. One should ask what positions the reader must accept and what counterpositions the reader must reject. Lonergan states this explicitly when he correlates "the real" with "being" and insists that this coincidence presupposes acceptance of positions and rejection of counterpositions, so he does not need to repeat the basic points at that stage (Lonergan 1992, 695). That leads to a further consequence, which is that if the proof presupposes positions, then it will not function for a reader who lives within the counterpositions. That does not mean the proof is false, of course. Still, it means that, for such a reader, it will not be a proof in the existential sense. St. Amour makes this point a bit clearer when he notes that the chapter never explicitly asks for whom it is a proof, yet it presses precisely that question by its demand for real assent to the minor premise, the claim about complete intelligibility (St. Amour 2010, 23).

This already reframes apologetics. In many apologetic contexts, one assumes that the task consists in producing premises that any rational agent must accept and in deriving conclusions that compel assent. Lonergan's remarks about proof as signs already qualify that assumption. His later remarks about horizon push this by further sharpening the qualification. The apologist may present reasons, yes. Yet, the apologist cannot substitute for the subject's responsible judgment. Likewise, the apologist also cannot presume a horizon that has not been formed.

Let me now state the thesis of this section, given what I have attempted to lay out thus far. The wrong first question asks whether the proof works

as an external device. The right first question asks what operations and what horizon make it possible for the proof to function as evidence. Lest one accuse me, or Lonergan for that matter, of evasion, it merits further clarifying that what we are doing is not, in fact, evasion, but a shift to what Lonergan calls method. Method's account of interpretation strengthens the same point from another angle. Texts are not understood by lexical decoding alone. Interpretation requires a movement from the interpreter's own horizon toward the horizon operative in the text, that is

> The major texts, the classics, in religion, letters, philosophy, theology, not only are beyond the initial horizon of their interpreters but also may demand an intellectual, moral, religious conversion of the interpreter over and above the broadening of his horizon. (Lonergan 2017, 152–53)

Where that movement does not occur, a text may be flattened into categories foreign to it. Applied to chapter nineteen, this means that a reader may hear a methodical invitation to self-appropriation as if it were only a self-sufficient scholastic deduction. Because horizons are conditioned by conversion, interpretation itself may require conversion.

Proof as "Signs" and the Virtually Unconditioned

Lonergan's chapter nineteen contains a short argument. It also contains many remarks about what argument can and cannot do. If we ignore those remarks, we lose the point. Let us begin from the center.

Lonergan states the main argument in a simple syllogistic form. St. Amour gives the formulation explicitly, and contemporary restatements often repeat it with slight modifications. The form runs as follows.

1. If the real is completely intelligible, then God exists.
2. The real is completely intelligible.
3. Therefore, God exists.

Lonergan then supports the minor premise by an ancillary argument. He defines being as what is to be known by correct understanding and affirmed reasonably, and he states that being is completely intelligible because one knows being completely only when one answers all intelligent questions correctly. He then correlates the real with being, since the real is what is meant by the name "real," and the meaning of the term must be correlated with the same operations.

St. Amour reproduces this structure, emphasizing how Lonergan's definitions arise from the unrestricted desire to know (St. Amour 2010, 7). Rojka notes that a crucial stage of the argument identifies the real with being,

then being with complete intelligibility, then complete intelligibility with an unrestricted act of understanding that possesses the properties of God (Rojka 2008, 37).

Lonergan then supports the major premise by a conditional chain. He argues that if the real is completely intelligible, then complete intelligibility exists. If complete intelligibility exists, then the idea of being exists. If the idea of being exists, then God exists. Dupré reproduces this conditional chain and reads it as Lonergan's answer to Kant (Dupré 1972, 143).

One might stop here and then ask whether each premise is true. Many interpreters do stop there, yet Lonergan does not. He inserts an epistemic warning. The argument on the page does not itself yield judgment. The page supplies signs. The signs can represent a relevant virtually unconditioned, but the reader must grasp it and must judge.

This claim rests on Lonergan's analysis of judgment. Judgment does not consist in adding an extra predicate called existence to an idea. Judgment consists in affirming that a condition has been fulfilled. The fulfillment yields what Lonergan calls the unconditioned. Now, that being said, it merits that we distinguish the formally unconditioned from the virtually unconditioned. A formally unconditioned proposition needs no conditions. A virtually unconditioned proposition has conditions, yet one knows that the conditions are fulfilled. St. Amour states this plainly in his account of Lonergan's opposition to the ontological argument (St. Amour 2010, 7). The ontological argument conflates understanding and judgment (Lonergan 1992, 692–95). Lonergan distinguishes them. He says that one must add, not an experience of God, but a grasp of the unconditioned, and more precisely a virtually unconditioned inference from true premises.

This yields two consequences that matter for apologetics.

First, Lonergan does not allow argument to bypass the subject. Argument functions within consciousness. It cannot replace consciousness. It cannot deliver the act of judgment as an external force. This may seem like a romantic claim. But it is not. It is actually an epistemic claim about what it is to judge, that is, we do not judge by coercion but rather that we judge by rational consciousness. Second, Lonergan does not allow the notion of God to verify itself. One may form the notion. One may work out the attributes by extrapolation from our restricted acts of understanding. One still must ask whether God is real, whether God exists. St. Amour emphasizes that Lonergan raises this question and that the question belongs to the province of judgment (St. Amour 2010, 6–9).

Now, bearing all of this inversion in mind, consider how apologetics usually proceeds. It offers reasons. It expects the reasons to compel assent, at

least in ideal circumstances. Lonergan breaks this expectation at the root. He says that even if one offers a perfectly valid argument, the argument still functions as sign, and the subject still must perform the act.

At first glance, this looks trivial. One might say that any proof requires that the reader understand it. That is obvious. But it is not merely this as Lonergan means more. He means that proof, as printed proposition and inference, remains abstract. It cannot guarantee the concrete act of affirming. This is on account of that act depending on the subject's self-transcendence. It depends on authenticity. Lonergan's own text hints at this dependence. When he identifies the real with being, he acknowledges that this coincidence presupposes acceptance of the positions and rejection of the counterpositions. He then states that every counterposition leads to its own reversal, since it becomes incoherent as soon as one claims to grasp it intelligently and affirm it reasonably.

That is not a purely formal remark but more precisely a remark concerning the subject's self-contradiction. A subject who denies intelligence while appealing to intelligent grasp performs a kind of incoherence.

At this point, one should now be able to see why the minor premise occupies the central role in debate. The claim that the real is completely intelligible does not function like an empirical premise. It functions like a claim about the unrestricted character of inquiry and about the meaning of being. That makes it vulnerable to critics who interpret it as a metaphysical dogma. It also makes it hard to accept for readers who have not appropriated Lonergan's account of knowing. St. Amour puts the issue with unusual directness. The question "Is the real completely intelligible" strikes at the root of one's deepest epistemological assumptions, and it cannot function as an unexamined premise but becomes affirmable only through the reader's appropriation of Lonergan's positions on knowing, being, and objectivity (St. Amour 2010, 23).

This is where apologetics often, if not always, stumbles. It is expected that one can set down a premise that any rational agent must accept. Lonergan's analysis, on the other hand, suggests that what the agent accepts depends on the agent's horizon and on the agent's moral and intellectual habits. It also suggests that the denial of the premise may itself reveal something. Not necessarily moral fault. It may reveal a counterposition. It may reveal a refusal of the unrestricted desire to know. It may reveal that the subject does not mean by "real" what Lonergan means by it.

Where does this leave us then? The next step then follows. If Lonergan's argument functions as sign, we must ask what makes a sign function. We must ask what makes a subject capable of grasping the sign as evidence. As such, we move from proof to horizon.

The first level of the argument must itself be parsed into distinct cognitional moments. The subject first encounters an argument as a set of signs. Those signs must be understood by direct insight. That understanding must then be submitted to reflective scrutiny until the subject grasps the relevant virtually unconditioned. Only then can judgment occur. The point is decisive. Chapter nineteen is not a shortcut from propositions to assent.

Later Lonergan and the Derivative Status of Proof

Lonergan did not repudiate the formal validity of chapter nineteen. He did, however, come to judge that its mode of presentation was inadequate. In *Philosophy of God and Theology*, the criticism is explicit. Chapter nineteen, he says, "treated God's existence and attributes in a purely objective fashion" and "made no effort to deal with the subject's religious horizon" (Lonergan 2004, 172). That judgment does not amount to a retraction of the argument. It shifts the issue. The question is no longer only whether the proof is valid in form, but whether the conditions under which such a proof can be understood, appropriated, and valued have themselves been made explicit. St. Amour is therefore right to insist that later Lonergan does not so much abandon the argument as resituate it within a broader methodological and anthropological context (St. Amour 2010, 10).

The first development is the resituation of logic within method. The point is not that logic becomes dispensable. It remains necessary for the clarity of terms, the coherence of propositions, and the rigor of inference. But it cannot carry the whole burden of philosophical and theological development. Later, Lonergan repeatedly contrasts a merely deductivist ideal with the concrete and cumulative movement of method. If one treats proof as basic, one is tempted to imagine that right reason can operate in abstraction from the historical, cultural, and intentional conditions of inquiry. If, by contrast, one treats method as basic, one begins from the recurrent operations of subjects who inquire, understand, reflect, and judge. Proof remains possible, but its place changes. It becomes derivative within a wider process of cognitional activity (St. Amour 2010, 10–12).

The second development is the transition from objectivism to conversion. Later, Lonergan's point is exact. Objectivity is not secured by leaving the subject out of account. It is achieved through the subject's self-transcendence. In *Method in Theology*, he writes that "objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject" and that the fundamental forms of such self-transcendence are intellectual, moral, and religious conversion (Lonergan 2017, 313). The implication for the present argument is plain. A philosophy of God that proceeds as though its

objectivity were independent of the subject who understands, reflects, judges, and decides will remain abstract at precisely the point where later Lonergan insists on concreteness. Hence, the defect of chapter nineteen was not that it reasoned about God, but that it did so without making the subject's horizon thematic.

The third development concerns anthropology. *Insight* had already carried out an extraordinary analysis of intelligence and judgment, and later Lonergan did not revoke that achievement. Yet he came to see more clearly that deliberation, evaluation, and decision must be thematized as a distinct level of intentional consciousness. St. Amour is right on this point. Once that level is made explicit, the reception of proof can no longer be treated as independent of the subject's existential and evaluative operations (St. Amour 2010, 14, 18). What the subject attends to, what the subject is willing to ask, what the subject counts as worth affirming, all of this is conditioned by the subject's operative horizon. The consequence for chapter nineteen is decisive. Its proof cannot be treated as though it addressed an abstract knower untouched by value, decision, and existential orientation.

The fourth development concerns the constitutive significance of religious experience and of the religious horizon. That is why the later criticism names not simply objectivism in general but specifically the failure to deal with the subject's religious horizon (St. Amour 2010, 10; see also Lonergan 2004, 172). The issue here is not that argument must yield to private feeling. It is that the question of God cannot be fully isolated from the horizon within which the subject's unrestricted desire, moral striving, and religious openness are concretely lived. St. Amour therefore argues, rightly, that later Lonergan gives due priority to religious experience without thereby rendering chapter nineteen worthless (St. Amour 2010, 18–20). Rather, he relocates it. The proof is no longer basic. It operates within a horizon shaped by conversion.

At this point the later Lonergan's methodological remarks acquire their full force. "Proof is never the fundamental thing" (Lonergan 2004, 195). That claim is easy to misread. It does not mean that proofs are invalid, nor that reason is powerless. It means that proof, in any serious sense, presupposes a system in which terms and relations have determinate meaning, and that such a system in turn presupposes a horizon. The horizon is not a premise from which one deduces conclusions. It is part of the subject's equipment if the subject is to understand the meaning of the terms, grasp the cogency of the argument, and value the goal of the inquiry. Hence the further claim follows with full necessity. "You can never prove a horizon" (Lonergan 2004, 195). One can clarify a horizon, test it, and perhaps invite its revision. One cannot derive it as though it were itself the conclusion of an earlier proof.

Method in Theology sharpens the same point from another angle in its account of interpretation. Understanding a text does not consist in lexical decoding alone. The interpreter must move from his or her own horizon toward the horizon operative in the text. Where that movement does not occur, the text may be flattened into categories foreign to its meaning. Applied to *Insight* chapter nineteen, this means that one may read a methodical invitation to self-appropriation as though it were nothing more than a self-sufficient scholastic deduction. The failure, in such a case, lies not only in assent but in interpretation (Lonergan 2017, 145–63).

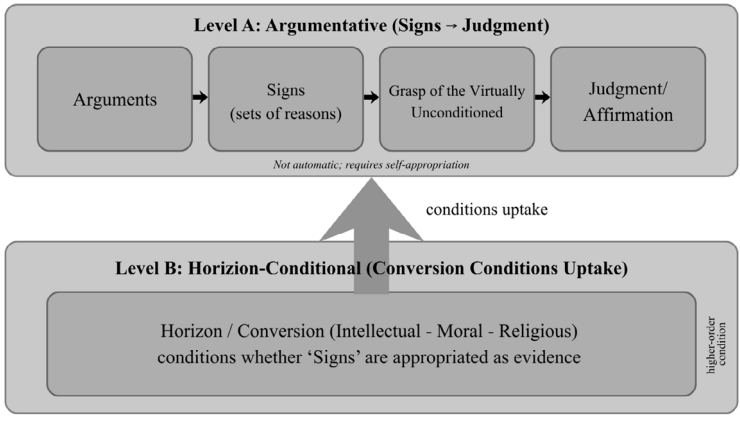
The paradox, then, is only apparent. Later Lonergan devalues proof relative to conversion, yet he does not repudiate the proof of chapter nineteen. St. Amour captures the ambiguity well when he notes that Lonergan could describe chapter nineteen as a survival from an earlier phase and yet still refuse to revoke it (St. Amour 2010, 20–21). The proper conclusion is neither that Lonergan abandoned rational apologetics nor that he dissolved rational warrant into historicist relativism. The issue is the relation between proof, method, and horizon. Once that relation is made explicit, one can integrate chapter nineteen with the later Lonergan rather than oppose them. The proof remains. But it remains as derivative. It functions within method, as sign rather than as a self-sufficient mechanism, and within a horizon whose revision belongs to conversion rather than to demonstration.

A Lonerganian Meta-Apologetics

When one speaks of apologetics, one usually means argument. One means reason offered in defense of a claim. One may also mean persuasion. Yet persuasion is not identical with proof. Lonergan's later method pushes us to distinguish them. It also pushes us to ask what apologetics can claim without falling into absentmindedness.

I propose a two-level framework. It is simple in form, but difficult in execution.

Figure 1: Proof as sign and conversion as condition. The first level includes understanding of signs, reflective grasp of the virtually unconditioned, and judgment.



On the first level, apologetic proofs function as rational instruments within consciousness. More exactly, they are received as signs, understood by direct insight, submitted to reflective grasp, and only then judged. They clarify terms. They distinguish understanding from judgment. They expose what Lonergan calls counterpositions, as clarified above. They invite the subject to grasp a virtually unconditioned judgment. This sequence must be kept explicit, because the proof does not move directly from propositions to assent but unfolds through the subject's own cognitional operations. St. Amour's account of Lonergan's critique of the ontological argument provides a paradigmatic instance. The ontological argument conflates understanding and judgment. Lonergan insists that a notion of God does not verify itself. As such, one must necessarily add a grasp of the unconditioned. This gives apologetics a rule rather than merely a critique of Anselm. Similarly, it gives apologetics a rule, that is, do not treat conceptual clarity as sufficient for affirmation, and do not substitute a notion for a judgment. On the second level, apologetic proofs presuppose horizons. That is to say, they presuppose a differentiation of consciousness and orientation to inquiry. Proof becomes rigorous only within a systematically formulated horizon. Conversion modifies horizons and is basic. Proof can invite. It can clarify. What it cannot do by itself is generate the horizon within which it becomes meaningful and valued.

This framework might look like a concession to subjectivism. It is not. Lonergan's claim that objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity denies subjectivism. It also denies naive objectivism. It insists that we

reach objectivity by self-transcendence. St. Amour quotes the relevant line, "objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject, and the fundamental forms of self-transcendence" involve conversion (Lonergan 2017, 313; see also St. Amour 2010, 13). If one tries to ensure objectivity apart from self-transcendence, one produces illusions. What does that entail, though? That line yields a methodological demand for apologetics. Apologetics must attend to the subject. It must attend to the subject's horizon, not as an external psychological accident, but as a condition of meaning and value. It requires apologetics to avoid abstraction that forgets what it presupposes. Let me make the framework more explicit by articulating two normative rules. I state them as rules, lest I be accused of proffering mere slogans.

The first rule concerns what proofs can do. Proofs can function as signs of a virtually unconditioned judgment. They can represent a conclusion that the subject may responsibly affirm, but only if the subject performs the act. Proof offers signs, yes, but the onus is on the reader to grasp and judge them. The second rule concerns what proofs cannot do. Proofs cannot prove a horizon, nor can they provide the differentiation of consciousness that makes their terms meaningful. And they certainly cannot substitute for conversion. In a word, one can "never prove a horizon" (Lonergan 2004, 195).

These two rules have immediate apologetic consequences. Firstly, they change how we interpret failure to convince. If a reader does not find a proof convincing, that may signal that the proof contains a flaw. It may also signal that the reader does not accept the positions presupposed by the proof. Similarly, it may signal that the reader's horizon does not allow the terms to have the intended meaning, or does not allow the goal of inquiry to be valued. There is a sort of existential openness of the proof. The argument may be valid, but whether the reader judges it sound depends on judgment of the premises, and that depends on who the reader is, including the reader's attainment of intellectual conversion. Beyond this, they also change how we interpret the task of apologetics. A common apologetic expectation assumes that one can reason a person into conversion. The later Lonergan actually claims that the apologist's task is neither to produce in others nor to justify for them God's gift of love, and that people in love have not reasoned themselves into being in love (Lonergan 2017, 333).

That line can sound like a dismissal of rational apologetics, whereas it is actually a delimitation. It says that apologetics should not pretend to do what only God does. It says that apologetics should focus on what rational argument can do, which is to clarify and to invite. One might still ask why we should keep chapter nineteen at all. St. Amour gives a persuasive

answer. He argues that chapter nineteen "calls into question the subject's intellectual horizon" (St. Amour 2010, 22). It demands genuineness in the acceptance of inquiry and reflection. It therefore functions as a test of the ultimate ramifications of critical realism. I contend that this suggests a new apologetic use. One can use the proof diagnostically. One can use it to test whether the subject will accept the unrestricted desire to know or whether the subject will appeal to obscurantism. This use fits the two-level framework. On the first level, the proof offers a structured set of signs. On the second level, the proof forces the subject to confront the horizon in which the subject lives. It does not prove the horizon. It reveals it.

This approach also addresses a criticism that Dupré presses. Dupré warns that philosophers often identify a system-required ultimate principle with the God of faith, as such, what he identifies is actually a content gap. The metaphysical conclusion remains thin whereas the religious intentionality supplies content. I argue that one can respond to this within the present framework without collapsing into fideism. One can accept that proof yields a metaphysical conclusion about God, and one can also accept that the personal content of faith arises within religious experience and conversion. (Spitzer 2014) One can locate the transition from metaphysical talk to religious talk not within an illicit inference but within a horizon. Doing so actually places the proof rather than trivializing it.

At this point, one might object by saying something akin to "Does this reduce the God-argument to a mere articulation of a horizon, as Dupré suggests horizon arguments tend to do?" It might, if one reads it poorly. A Lonerganian meta-apologetics does not say that God exists because I have a horizon. It says that proofs function only within horizons. It also says that some horizons are authentic and others are not. As such, we must take authenticity as a norm. One can evaluate horizons by their coherence, by their openness to questioning, by their capacity to avoid reversal under critique. In fact, Rojka cites Lonergan's claim that untrue theories call for reversal and that method takes its stand on the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to understand correctly (Rojka 2008, 34; see also Lonergan 1992, 708). Does this mean we fall into relativism? No. That conclusion would follow only if one treated horizon as an arbitrary standpoint. In Lonergan, however, horizon names a historically conditioned yet norm-governed field of meaning and value.

As such, if all this obtains, then we can now articulate the claim that constitutes the original contribution of this article. Lonerganian apologetics should not aim first at producing demonstrations that compel assent across horizons. Rather, it should aim at disclosing the norms implicit in inquiry

and at inviting the subject into self-appropriation, by which the subject may come to perform the judgments that the proofs signify. Proofs then function as diagnostic and constructive tools within method. They can expose counterpositions and support conversion. They can stabilize the subject's movement toward authenticity. They should not claim to generate the horizon that makes them meaningful. For this reason, the next section tests this claim by revisiting the most contested element in the chapter nineteen proof.

Re-reading *Insight* 19's Minor Premise as a Diagnostic

The claim that the real is completely intelligible occupies a strange place in Lonergan's argument. It is not an empirical observation, and it is not a mere definitional truth. It functions as a premise that forces a decision about what one means by real, by being, and, naturally, by inquiry. That is why it draws criticism. That is also why it can function as diagnostic. We can see its structure in Lonergan's own words. He defines being as what is to be known by correct understanding and says that being is completely intelligible because one knows it completely only when one answers all intelligent questions correctly. He then says that the real is being.

This seems at first to be a simple definitional move. Yet it is not. It presupposes acceptance of the positions and rejection of the counterpositions. Lonergan says so. If a reader rejects the premise, what does the rejection mean? It can mean different things. Sometimes it means that the reader rejects a strong metaphysical thesis, perhaps a version of the principle of sufficient reason. Rojka notes that one may interpret Lonergan's "all questions have answers" as parallel to Leibniz's principle that everything has a reason, and he notes that this leads to affirming complete intelligibility. (Rojka 2008, 47) Critics then argue that we can do science and common sense without such a premise. Hepburn, as Rojka reports, treats complete intelligibility as a regulative ideal that extrapolates from limited successes, not as a condition of having any knowledge at all. If that is right, then the minor premise seems too strong (Rojka 2008, 47; see also Hepburn 1973, 50).

Here the key terms must be kept exact. To accept the positions is, for Lonergan, to accept one's own intelligence and reasonableness and to stand by that acceptance. To reject the counterpositions is to reject the interference of other desire with the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know. Their "reversal" occurs because a counterposition becomes incoherent the moment it is claimed to be grasped intelligently and affirmed reasonably.

Sometimes the rejection means that the reader reads "complete intelligibility" in the wrong register. The phrase can suggest that we, as finite knowers, must be able to answer all questions. Lonergan does not claim that. He correlates being with what is to be known if every question were answered correctly. The phrase refers to the objective of the unrestricted desire to know. It need not imply that finite subjects can attain it. The affirmation of complete intelligibility is conditioned neither by its actual fulfillment nor by the real possibility of its fulfillment (Lonergan 1992, 696; see also Jaramillo 2007, 221–67). This does not settle the issue, but it does clarify the claim.

Sometimes the rejection reveals a more basic counterposition. It reveals that the reader does not accept the unrestricted character of inquiry. The reader may accept inquiry in some domains but refuse it at the limit. As such, the reader may accept obscurantism. Lonergan calls obscurantism a counterposition. As such, it would be mistaken to conceptualize it as mere silence, but better to understand it as a refusal of the unrestricted demand of inquiry at the very point where inquiry presses toward ultimate intelligibility. He insists that one cannot brush aside questions without assigning a reason and that questions keep coming. Rojka quotes Lonergan's claim that obscurantism is reprobated (Lonergan 2004, 8; see also Rojka 2008, 39). The diagnostic use of the minor premise depends on distinguishing these possibilities. One does not accuse the critic of bad faith. One asks what the critic means. One asks what is being denied. It is precisely here, I contend, that St. Amour supplies a fruitful interpretive key. He argues that the proof is existentially wide-open and that one key issue is whether the minor premise becomes a matter of real assent. The premise strikes at the root of one's deepest epistemological assumptions. This suggests that the apologetic function of the premise may lie less in its role as a premise to be defended in abstraction and more in its role as a demand for self-clarification.

Let us test this with an example. A reader might say, "Reality is not completely intelligible. Some facts are brute." That claim may mean, "I cannot explain everything." That is a modest epistemic claim. Or it may mean, "Reality itself includes brute facts that admit no explanation." That is a stronger metaphysical claim. Lonergan's own text rejects the second claim sharply. He insists that to talk about "mere matters of fact" that admit no explanation is to talk about nothing, and that if existence is a mere matter of fact it is nothing (Lonergan 1992, 700). Rojka quotes this as Lonergan's "rude and harsh" statement and ties it to Lonergan's identification of being with reasonably affirmed intelligibility (Rojka 2008, 40). The apologetic task

here does not consist first in producing an external proof that brute facts are impossible. It consists in asking what the subject means by "real," what the subject means by "nothing," and how the subject can reasonably affirm brute facts while claiming to know. One brings the issue back to judgment. One asks how the subject distinguishes correct understanding from fantasy and how the subject grounds the claim that something is the case. One can then show that the assertion "There are brute facts" functions as a refusal of inquiry at the limit, and that such a refusal may conflict with the subject's own practice of explanation in other domains.

This diagnostic function also clarifies a common charge of circularity. Rojka reports Bernard Tyrrell's position that one must commit oneself to complete intelligibility and then affirm it, which makes the procedure look circular (Rojka 2008, 45; see also Tyrrell 1974, 121). Tyrrell sharpens the point by insisting that validation of Lonergan's formal proof presupposes wholehearted commitment to the positions and, indeed, an unrestricted commitment to complete intelligibility (Tyrrell 1974, 121). Read crudely, that formulation sounds viciously circular, as though one had first to assume what the proof is meant to establish. Read within Lonergan's method, however, the point is not that one arbitrarily stipulates complete intelligibility, but that one cannot sever chapter nineteen from the preceding work of self-appropriation and reversal of counterpositions. What looks like circularity at the level of isolated propositions is better understood as reflexivity at the level of cognitional performance.

Rojka himself notes that one would normally expect a good reason to believe reality is completely intelligible and then make a commitment. A Lonerganian meta-apologetics responds by distinguishing logical circularity from methodical reflexivity. Lonergan does not ask the reader to assume complete intelligibility as a premise without reason. He asks the reader to appropriate the meaning of being and the meaning of real as correlated with cognitional operations. He then asks the reader to judge whether the counterpositions can sustain themselves without reversal. That does not remove every concern, but it does reframe the concern. The argument proceeds by uncovering what the subject already performs in acts of understanding and judgment. As such, it does not proceed by begging the question.

This is why the minor premise works as a diagnostic. It forces the subject to decide whether to stand by the unrestricted desire to know or to qualify it at the limit. That is an existential decision about what one will permit oneself to ask, and not the naïve reading as a mere logical decision. Contemporary reformulations may foreground ontological or cosmological

entry-points for pedagogical reasons, but my concern here is Lonergan's own cognitional presentation and the horizon it presupposes.

In a similar way, the diagnostic reading also helps address Dupré's key objection that we mentioned above. Dupré argues that the unlimited desire to know does not entail ultimate intelligibility. A defender might respond by trying to prove ultimate intelligibility as a metaphysical fact. The meta-apologetic approach responds by asking a different question. What does the denial of intelligibility do to the meaning of judgment? What does it do to the meaning of "real"? If the subject can deny intelligibility while still claiming to know, perhaps the subject uses "real" in a different way than Lonergan. The apologetic task then shifts to clarifying meaning and exposing the costs of alternative meanings. One may still need to address Dupré's metaphysical concern. Yet one will address it at the right place, which is the subject's account of knowing and affirming.

Finally, the diagnostic reading makes explicit what St. Amour says chapter nineteen implicitly asks. For whom is this a proof? (St. Amour 2010, 23) The meta-apologetic answer runs as follows. It is a proof for the subject who accepts the positions, rejects the counterpositions, and lives within a horizon that values the unrestricted desire to know. It is not a proof for the subject who treats inquiry as a tool for local success but denies its unrestricted aim, or for the subject who treats "complete intelligibility" as a regulative ideal with no ontological import. In those cases, chapter nineteen functions differently. It functions as a sign that reveals a difference of horizon. This grounds apologetics in method and, thus, does not reduce it to a sociology of belief, as some critics are wont to charge.

What the Field Gains

Lonergan's chapter nineteen argument invites an old response. People ask whether it works. What they actually mean is whether the syllogism compels assent. That question matters, but it is not the first question Lonergan's method raises. Lonergan insists that proof on paper supplies signs and that the reader must perform the act of judgment by grasping a virtually unconditioned. St. Amour shows that Lonergan later insisted that proof becomes rigorous only within a systematically formulated horizon and that conversion, not proof, is basic, since one cannot prove a horizon. This paper has argued that these claims yield a Lonerganian meta-apologetics. Proof functions as sign and conversion functions as condition. On the first level, apologetic proofs clarify meaning, expose counterpositions, and invite the subject to responsible judgment. On the second level, the subject's horizon conditions whether those signs can function as evidence. One cannot

reason a horizon into existence. One can, however, invite self-appropriation. One can invite a subject to test whether his or her account of knowing can withstand its own implications.

When one reads chapter nineteen in this way, one can integrate it with the later Lonergan rather than opposing them. One need not treat chapter nineteen as a mere survival. One need not treat it as a device that should compel assent across horizons. Yet, one can certainly treat it as a methodical instrument. One can also make a specific apologetic move that the current literature often lacks, that is, one can read the famous minor premise about complete intelligibility as a diagnostic, a way of revealing whether a subject accepts the unrestricted desire to know or retreats into a counterposition.

This integration reshapes several debates in apologetics and philosophy of religion. It reshapes debates about the Kantian critique by shifting attention from an external inference from phenomena to noumena to the subject's own norms of judgment and objectivity. It reshapes debates about the "effectiveness" of proofs by showing that effectiveness depends on horizon and that proof cannot supply what horizon supplies. It also reshapes debates about the content gap between metaphysical conclusions and the God of faith by locating the transition to religious concreteness in horizon and conversion, not in illicit inference. The originality of this proposal lies not in offering a new proof of God's existence, but in specifying the methodological conditions under which Lonergan's proof can count as evidence, and in showing that the minor premise functions diagnostically as a test of intellectual conversion rather than as a premise detachable from the work of self-appropriation.

The result does not satisfy every critic. It does not aim to silence Dupré's doubts about ultimate intelligibility by sheer assertion. It does not aim to replace philosophical argument with appeals to private feeling. What it aims to do is set apologetics on a firmer basis, one that takes seriously what Lonergan called method. It aims to remain faithful to Lonergan's own insistence that objectivity comes through authentic subjectivity. As such, this proposal does not answer every objection. It does, however, relocate the debate. It asks whether a proof can be assessed apart from the horizon within which its terms are understood, its premises are assented to, and its conclusion is valued as worth affirming.

References

Dupré, Louis. 1972. "The Cosmological Argument after Kant." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3 (3): 131–45.

Hepburn, Ronald. 1973. "Transcendental Method: Lonergan's Arguments for the Existence of God." *Theoria to Theory* 3 (7): 46–50.

Jaramillo, Alejandro. 2007. "The Necessity of Raising the Questions of God: Aquinas and Lonergan on the Quest after Complete Intelligibility." *The Thomist* 71 (2): 221–67.

Lonergan, Bernard. 1992. *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Vol. 3 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

—. 2004. Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980. Vol. 17 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

—. 2017. *Method in Theology*. Vol. 14 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Rojka, Luboš. 2008. "Human Authenticity and the Question of God in the Philosophy of Bernard Lonergan." *Forum Philosophicum* 13 (1): 31–49. https://doi.org/10.5840/forphil20081313.

Spitzer, Robert J., S.J. 2010. *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*. Grand Rapids, MI: B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

—. 2014. "Philosophical Proof of God: Derived from Principles in Bernard Lonergan's *Insight*." Magis Center of Reason and Faith, May. Accessed April 13, 2026. https://www.magiscenter.com/blog/philosophical-proof-of-god-derived-from-principles-in-bernard-lonergans-insight.

St. Amour, Paul. 2010. "Bernard Lonergan on Affirmation of the Existence of God." *Analecta Hermeneutica* 2.

Tyrrell, Bernard. 1974. *Bernard Lonergan's Philosophy of God*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

The Primal We

Person and Community as Co-Constitutive in Karol Wojtyła's Philosophy

Justin Sean Luis Canaria

Abstract Studies of Karol Wojtyła's personalism have consistently kept to his theme of understanding the person in a way that begins with the individual, prior to addressing the community. Following the paradigm of Person and Act, the I is seen as the ground for understanding the We, as it is through experience that one has contact with reality, and the community is itself composed of individual subjects. This article, however, inverts the question. Can a Community-First approach strengthen personalism without falling into the trap of collectivism? I argue that the community is not merely a result of individual participation, but also the primordial soil that allows the subject to emerge as a person.

Keywords Community; Co-Constitutive; Individual; Subjectivity; Wojtyła, Karol

✍ Justin Sean Luis Canaria, University of Santo Tomas Graduate School, Manila, Philippines
✉ justinseanluis@gmail.com 0009-0005-4744-7445

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 69–85 Subm. 27 Feb 2026 Acc. 20 April 2026
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043 DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.05

I. Introduction

Karol Wojtyła's personalist philosophy is best known for its comprehensive account of the human person that seeks to overcome radical conceptions of the latter (Hołub et al. 2019, 33). What influenced him in his decision to embark on such a task was the character of the era he was living in. Drawing on the thought of modern and contemporary philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Max Scheler, harmonizing them with the classical Aristotelean-Thomistic Christian philosophical tradition, the end product of his philosophizing is an original personalist account, rooted in Thomistic metaphysics, that employs phenomenology within a realist framework. Such a methodology enables one to arrive at truths about the human person otherwise inadequately grasped in both pre-modern and modern ways of thinking (Hołub et al. 2019, 29–36).

The method of inquiry he employed always starts with the individual and their experience of action (person-act), and then proceeds to examine interpersonal and intersocial relations (person-person) and the meaning of community. This means that the social or communal character of human acts is rooted in their personal character, not vice versa. The individual person (I) is the ontological anchor, a self-contained suppositum from which the communal We eventually emerges through the exercise of participation. This methodological priority suggests that human sociality is a secondary, almost accidental property—the fruit of individual efficacy rather than its condition. As Ignatik explains:

> Only a thorough cognition of the subject in himself, especially in the correlation between himself and his action, opens a path to understanding human intersubjectivity fully. Presupposing the concepts of community and relation in anthropological interpretation may result in a failure to grasp both what is constitutive for the person and what fundamentally determines community and relation precisely as the community and relation of persons. (Ignatik 2021, 47; see also Wojtyła 2021)

However, a rigorous re-examination of Wojtyła's primary texts, bolstered by their more critically nuanced translations, allows for a daring methodological reversal. This reversal posits that community is not simply a by-product of human participation, but rather is the primordial soil in which the individual can develop, achieve agency, and fulfil their potential as a person. The study of the conditions of possibility for human action (*czyn*) reveals that the personal I already exists within the boundary of a communal horizon, and that this internalized communal horizon is the foundation for the person's understanding of self-determination.

Thus, in this work, I will explore the possibility of studying the subjectivity of the community first, as prior to the individual, with a view to going beyond what is already established and daring to interrogate a new possibility that may show up on the horizon—given that our aim is to arrive at truth. The end goal is to deepen discussion of the already robust personalist system that the Polish philosopher-cum-pope created in his works, while simultaneously avoiding the trap of collectivism.

The foundational points of reference for this project will be *Person and Act* (*Osoba i czyn*) and *Love and Responsibility* (*Miłość i odpowiedzialność*), both of them as translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. The latter fact is essential to the present analysis, as it rectifies significant unauthorized editorial interventions found in earlier translations, such as the 1979 version edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. It also compensates for the limitations of the present author as someone unable to speak Polish at the present time.

II. Scholarly Consensus

Works dealing with the thought of Karol Wojtyła mostly continue his project of reconciling classical Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics with modern phenomenology. This attempt at fostering subjectivity is a response to the twentieth-century crises of totalitarianism and materialism. The scholarly consensus is that Wojtyła's goal was to uphold the irreducible uniqueness of the person in the face of its being swallowed up by collective ideologies.

For example, in his book *At the Center of the Human Drama*, Kenneth Schmitz provides an existential analysis of the human drama through an articulation of the ontological anchor found in the scholastic notion of the suppositum, thereby establishing a basis for determining that the person as an objective being must be established before analysing the person as a subject of experience (Schmitz 1993, 142). In the same vein, Rocco Buttiglione identifies the substantial subjectivity of the person as an essential bridge connecting being to consciousness (Buttiglione 1997, 131). Meanwhile, Jarosław Kupczak, in *Destined for Liberty*, calls self-determination the defining characteristic of the person, such that the individual's freedom to act provides the foundation for establishing moral value and personhood. These authors also provide a consistent view of the individual's ability and capacity to participate, and to decide whether doing so will preserve their personal transcendence and integration while acting together with others (Kupczak 2000, 115–17). Hence, the community is an accidental structure—more precisely, a *quasi-subjectivity*—wherein its members are directed towards the common good, since "the proper (substantial) subject of existing and acting, even when existing and acting are realized together

with others, is always the man-person" (Wojtyła 2021, 384). In itself, the community "does not constitute a new subject of action but only introduces new relations between people, who are the real subjects of action" (Wojtyła 2021, 384).

Nevertheless, some researchers have taken a different approach to reading Wojtyła's works. One such scholar is Rev. Grzegorz Hołub. He believes that in order to reach mature comprehension about the nature of humans, it must be understood as having two essential pillars: substantiality and relationality (Hołub 2021, 57). Citing Norris Clarke, he posits his concept of *substance-in-relation*, arguing that the relational character is inherent in the human person's dynamic nature, rather than an additional factor. Fr. Leszek Kuc affirms this by asserting that philosophical anthropology should tackle the relation of persons rather than the *co-relation of person and act* (Kuc 1974, 135). Although Wojtyła was adamant about maintaining his chosen methodology, he did acknowledge the validity of Kuc's method (Wojtyła 1974, 244).

Furthermore, the discussions among scholars which took place during the Lublin Symposium (1970/1971) in the wake of the publication of Wojtyła's *Person and Act* also provided several reasons to call for a more relational approach. As many participants pointed out, although Wojtyła's research was based on individual acts, the direction of his thought continually pointed outward toward fulfillment within a community (Szostek 1974, 50).

Fr. Marian Jaworski, a close collaborator of Wojtyła, emphasized that "the human person must . . . be given visually in experience" and that "this experience is always an experience of being 'together with others'" (Jaworski 1974, 91). Prof. Antoni Stępień and Dr. Andrzej Półtawski explored the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of having lived experience, noting that the *I* is the ultimate basis of the stream of consciousness, but that this stream always "surfaces" in dialogue with the other (Stępień 1974, 111; Półtawski 1974, 121). Even the methodological critiques offered by Fr. Stanisław Kamiński, who found the project of unifying Thomism and phenomenology "maximalistic," underscore the central problem: if we want a realistic anthropology, we must account for the person in their full social reality (Kamiński 1974, 63).[1]

1. Despite these issues relating to individualism that reflect his phenomenological starting point, I argue that this remains a thinly veiled concern. The reality is that throughout his works Wojtyła emphasizes the truth of action and stresses that the person is inextricably formed by culture, education and the nation. Accordingly, these are not mere sociological backdrops, but the necessary communal inheritance through which the individual realizes their personhood (see Ringor 2025).

For this reason, even if it is the method adopted by the original author himself, the concern persists that an Individual-First approach to anthropology could run the risk of isolating the person in their own substantiality. Whereas Schmitz advocates the view that the *suppositum* is the necessary anchor for participation, I would argue that the *suppositum* itself is dynamic, in that its nature, qua its being rational, makes it inherently social. If the person is *destined for liberty*, as Kupczak asserts, then that destiny cannot be fulfilled in solitude, but rather only via the discovery of the neighbor (*bliźni*) as a co-constitutive presence (Kupczak 2000, 142). The polemic here is not against the existence of the *suppositum*, but against the methodological assumption that it can be adequately studied in isolation from the *communal soil* that nurtures it

Taking my cue from these scholars, I seek to advance this discussion concerning the possibility of a framework providing for a Community-First perspective. We will thus investigate whether the community, as the social feature impressed upon human existence itself, can serve as the *primordial beginning* from which the personal *I* germinates. The premise here is that *experience of oneself as a person is mediated by the experience of others*. We do not first find ourselves, and then look for neighbors: we find ourselves because we are already in the neighborhood of *others*. Hence, the social reality of the person is not an afterthought but a foundational principle.

III. Linguistic Structure and the Community-First Anthropology in Person and Act

Throughout *Person and Act*, Wojtyła makes it clear that how a person acts reveals who they are as a person (Wojtyła 2021, 104). The epistemological inversion is very important, because it indicates that we should begin from the experience of what men and women do, rather than from a definition of what they are. From that experience, we can then derive definitions of what it means to have a uniquely human character.

Wojtyła distinguishes between *man acts* (*działanie*) and *something happens in man* (*dzianie się*). The former refers to conscious and willed actions, while the latter are spontaneous and not a result of the willing of the subject who experiences these happenings automatically. Only the former are characterized as authentic human action, for they are characterized by efficacy (*sprawczość*), the lived experience that the *I* is the agent of his or her actions (Wojtyła 2021, 168). Efficacy is rooted in self-determination (*samostanowienie*), which Wojtyła identifies as the "vertical transcendence" of the person—the ability to stand above one's own impulses and decide one's own direction.

While all of this appears straightforward, a closer inspection of the original Polish terminology reveals that Wojtyła's anthropology is not merely an analysis of individual agency: in fact, it already contains the structural seeds of participation (Hołub 2021, 101–02). These can be found in the choice of terms such as *czyn*, *akt*, *suppositum*, *bliźni*, and *świadomość*. Each of these terms illustrates how action ultimately occurs within a relational framework. These definitions highlight the way in which individuals fulfil themselves not in isolation but through participation, which depends upon the existence of other persons.

A Metalinguistic Analysis of Selected Key Polish Terms

A prime example of this is the distinction between *czyn* and *akt*. *Czyn* refers to a human action that carries moral value and personal responsibility. *Akt*, on the other hand, refers to the metaphysical principle of *actus,* which points to the actualization of a potency (Wojtyła 2021, 71–74).[2] By identifying his work as *Osoba i czyn* and not *Osoba i akt*, Wojtyła signals that his concern is not with abstract metaphysical activation but lived, morally accountable agency (Wojtyła 2021, 4).[3]

Czyn is intelligible only within a horizon of responsibility, and therefore presupposes other persons. Hence, moral acts are never solipsistic: they are always directed to another, and so are answerable to authority, communicable, and socially legible. This alone reveals that the person is not a self-enclosed monad but an efficacious agent whose self-determination unfolds within the field of intersubjectivity. The emphasis on *czyn* over and above *akt* subtly, but decisively, orients personal identity towards relationality.

To further strengthen this argument from efficacy, we can also point to Wojtyła's treatment of consciousness. Distinguishing between *conscious action* (*działanie świadome*) and the *consciousness of action* (*świadomość działania*), Wojtyła uses the adjective *świadomościowy* (*consciousness-related*)

2. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 2.

3. At this point, the matter of the title of the work can also be considered. Wojtyła's work was originally rendered in English as *The Acting Person*. The latter title emphasizes the unity of the subject as the agent of action. Even granting that such a construal can be to some extent justified philosophically, the fact remains that the literal structure of the original Polish *Osoba i czyn* retains an explicit distinction between the person and the act. More than just a linguistic choice, it is methodologically apt as it allows for an analytical examination of the relation between person and action without dissolving either into the other. Hence, the newer translation is a more accurate rendering of the original work as reflected in other languages, such as the Italian *Persona e atto*. Nonetheless, the insight we can take from the original title is an important one, showing as it does that action ultimately belongs to the acting subject as an irreducible *suppositum*.

in describing the two-fold functions of consciousness (Wojtyła 2021, 139–40). Consciousness is not the same as the action, but rather reflects (*odzwierciedlanie*) and internalizes (*uwewnętrznienie*) the actions of conscious beings (Wojtyła 2021, 142–43). The trans-illuminating consciousness provides the means for efficacy, and consequently the realization of moral responsibility and relational consequences. Therefore, efficacy (sprawczość) has an inherent moral quality, as the very existence of consciousness indicates the manner in which one's actions have an impact on another. Consequently, consciousness manifests both autonomy and participation within oneself.

Moreover, this reflexive function of consciousness that makes individuals aware of their own actions enables the individual to attain self-knowledge through self-awareness. The *I* can objectify itself as an object of self-knowledge while remaining a subject itself (Acosta and Reimers 2016, 118). The reflexive function therefore cannot be exclusively biological, as it presupposes a conceptual and linguistic framework which allows the self to be named and interpreted.

Such a framework cannot be generated in isolation. To talk about concepts such as *I*, *act*, *good*, or *responsible* requires other individuals to establish the structures of these semantic categories, which are inherited and continue to be shared through time. Hence, as Rocco Buttiglione points out, Wojtyła's phenomenology can only ever unfold within the horizon of a given culture and tradition (Buttiglione 1997, 148–49). Therefore, the community is not added as something optional, but rather necessary if one is to be aware of oneself and fulfilled. In short, to objectify the *I* requires communal language that serves to enable such objectification.

This orientation towards relationality, however, is safeguarded by Wojtyła's use of the term *suppositum* to denote the ontological subject of existence. The *suppositum* guarantees that the person remains a subject (someone, not something) and therefore supports the premise that the person cannot be reduced to just being a functional role within the collective (Kupczak 2000, xxii). The *I* (*Ja*) is an embodiment of the lived experience of the support provided by the ontological foundation. As noted by those who have commented on it, the *suppositum* anchors the subjectivity of each person by preventing the individual from being reduced to a mere stream of consciousness or a social construct. Thus, the metaphysical foundation provides additional support for authentic participation and ensures that only an irreducible subject can participate, because only a subject (as opposed to a mere thing) can be a part of a communion (i.e., participate) without being absorbed into that communion. Thus, community does not eliminate individuality, and in fact assumes and affirms it.

When speaking of community, Wojtyła utilizes the expression *bliźni*, which is commonly translated into English as *neighbor*. Grounded in the commandment to love, to call someone a *neighbor* (*bliźni*) goes beyond spatial proximity or social affiliation, meaning much more than just being geographically or socially connected. It designates the other as *another I* (a *Thou*) (Buttiglione 1997, 182; see also Wojtyła 2013, 24). Thus, it further resists both individualism and collectivism by emphasizing the sense of the personal identity and subjectivity of the other person. The *Thou* is neither a mere part of the social order nor an abstract member of the human race. They are a unique subject who, like the *I*, cannot be reduced to anything else. Participation, therefore, is not externally imposed, but rather arises from the fundamental structure of personal recognition. Encountering the *Thou* as *bliźni* goes beyond existing as a separate individual.

Collectively, these linguistic clarifications demonstrate that Wojtyła's anthropological model does not entail individualism, and resists collectivism. The moral act (*czyn*), which is based upon an irreducible *suppositum* experienced through reflective consciousness and directed toward other people (*bliźni*), shows that self-determination is structurally binding. The individual is not an isolated monad who eventually joins the community: rather, they are part of a larger community from birth, in virtue of how their actions reflect the true essence of their being. Participation is not just an "add-on" to our identity as individuals: it is a vital ingredient in helping us reach self-fulfillment. In this way, Wojtyła's careful use of terms in the Polish language confirms what this *Co-Constitutive Theory* advocates—that any individual can only fully be themselves by way of participation in the community.

IV. Community as the Condition of Possibility for Action

As was stated in the first section, the majority of *Person and Act* deals with the individual and their actions, culminating in a discussion of the theory of participation. Community thus appears as a secondary horizon within which an already constituted person subsequently chooses to act. Inasmuch as this construal defends the metaphysical irreducibility of the person, it risks obscuring a deeper simultaneity already operative in Wojtyła's thought—as noted by scholars.

For this reason, I propose a *Co-Constitutive* way of understanding the person and the community. Instead of arguing over which comes first, I claim that the person and the communal horizon emerge together *simultaneously* within lived experience. The two are distinct yet inseparable dimensions of one and the same anthropological reality—like two sides of a single coin. There is no *I* without a *Thou* and no *Thou* without a *We*.

To be clear, this argument in no way denies Wojtyła's emphasis on the metaphysical primacy of the *suppositum*. When discussing community Wojtyła emphasizes the "irrevocable primacy of the personal subject in relation to community" in both metaphysical and methodological terms (Wojtyła 2021, 289). It is precisely because of the *suppositum* that the individuality of the person remains intact and safeguarded from collectivism.

At the same time, however, he also states that "the feature of community—the social feature—is impressed upon human existence itself" (Wojtyła 2021, 378). By using the term *impressed*, it is clear that sociality, for Wojtyła, is not an external reality added to an already complete subject, but something inscribed into the very structure of existence. This means that the personal capacity for participation does not arise in a vacuum. Participation may be a capacity of the person, but the soil in which this capacity develops is already communal. Thus, the tension in Wojtyła's text—between the primacy of the subject and the imprinted social feature—invites a deeper synthesis. What is metaphysically prior (the person as *suppositum*) is experientially inseparable from what is socially given. The order of being and the order of lived emergence must not be collapsed into one another, much as the cosmological and personalist views of the human person complete and enrich one another (Wojtyła 2021, 537–38).

The community is thus no longer a secondary environment that the individual finds themself in. It becomes a condition of possibility for authentic human action (*czyn*). Without this primordial horizon, the human person remains at the level of biological functioning, incapable of the transcendence and integration that fulfils them as a person. To better understand this vision, I would like to present two cases where this dynamic is best illustrated: the encounter with the *Thou*, and the dynamic of participation.

The Thou as the Catalyst for the I

The interplay between subjectivity and community shows that individuals and communities together shape the experiential articulation of personal identity. Wojtyła's theory of participation explains that the *I-Thou* relationship offers opportunities for self-fulfillment while maintaining the uniqueness of each person. Recognizing the *Thou* as an equally dignified subject means that the *I* comes to know who it is through its relationship with others.

These ideas have been echoed by many personalist thinkers. One example is John Crosby, who says that an individual's recognition of his or her own dignity cannot be separated from recognizing the dignity of other individuals (Crosby 2019, 12). The *Thou* functions as both mirror and resistance: in

encountering another freedom, the *I* discovers that its own desires are not identical with its freedom. In this way, the encounter with the *Thou* reveals the limitations of one's self. One cannot simply reduce the *Thou* to an object of use: one must respect the *Thou* as a subject (Crosby 2019, 12). Therefore, the *Thou* serves as a catalyst for awakening the moral dimension of the *I*.

If an individual recognizes the dignity of another person through their relationship, then the community is not secondary but primordial at the experiential level. An individual becomes truly self-aware as a person in their relationship with another person. Therefore, intersubjectivity is not a secondary but a primary catalyst for the *I* to fully emerge.

The Structure of Participation

Wojtyła defines participation as "that which corresponds to the transcendence of the person in the act when this act is performed 'together with others,' in various social or inter-human relations" (Wojtyła 2021, 385). Many scholars view participation as a moral choice made by an already constituted person (Hołub et al. 2019, 77). The *Co-Constitutive Theory* refines this articulation: participation is not only a capacity exercised by the person, but also the very mode through which personhood is actualized.

If the moral act (*czyn*) reveals the person, and if the personalistic value of the act lies in the affirmation of the humanity of others, then the social aspect of personal action is woven into the act of revealing oneself. To act as a person implies that the acting subject acknowledges the existence of another person. Therefore, participation is not simply cooperative behavior. It provides the structure by which an individual integrates their freedom and responsibility.

In this aspect of participation, the concept of transcendence takes on a relationship-oriented nature. In *Person and Act*, Wojtyła identifies self-determination as *vertical transcendence*, which indicates a person's ability to rise above immediate emotion and determine one's self in the truth (Wojtyła 2021, 241–42). However, transcendence presupposes resistance—the presence of another freedom that cannot be reduced to one's own projects. This confrontation comes from those persons with whom we interact through community. By virtue of being exposed to the freedoms of individuals, we come to understand the limits of our individual freedoms and find ourselves bound to these limits by virtue of our responsibilities to one another in community. Through our experiences of confronting one another, transcendence becomes intelligible.

Simultaneity and the Emergence of the Person

At this point, the *Co-Constitutive Theory* makes it clear that the individual is not negated but reframed in the context of the unfolding of their experience. Ontologically, the *I* exists as a *suppositum*. As such, he or she cannot be reduced to, identified with, or created by the community. However, phenomenologically and axiologically, the idea of personhood can only take effect in the community, since that trait is impressed upon existence. It is through the co-existence of the *I* and the *We* that both emerge simultaneously.

When one says that the individual *I* and communal *We* emerge simultaneously, one does not mean to validate a collective sense of self or an individualistic sense of a collective. All it means is that when the *I* transcends itself in a mutual encounter with a *Thou*, the *I* has the opportunity to actualize an understanding of itself as freedom through confrontation with another's freedom. Consequently, the act of self-determination is made intelligible by the *Thou*'s mirroring and resistance.[4]

As such, the inherent communicative nature of individual (*I*) and community (*We*) should not be viewed as sequential levels, but as co-implicative. This co-implicative nature leads both the *I* and the *Thou* to self-determination, and this co-determination provides the community with a framework for participation. It is in this sense that we can say that there is no *I* without a *Thou*, and no *Thou* without a *We*.

In sum, in the context of personal experience, both the subject and their relations are given simultaneously. In participation, the *I* genuinely partakes in the humanity of others, and others partake in the *I*'s humanity. Yet this experience does not relativize the ontological weight of one's own humanity. Rather, in common action, it brings one's individuality into sharper relief. Unlike alienation, true participation allows the individual person to fully manifest their subjective self-determination, fulfil themselves through action, and, consequently, bear a distinct moral responsibility for that action.

V. Against Totalitarianism

At first glance, any proposal that puts methodological emphasis on the community will raise concerns about its falling into what Wojtyła himself

4. To be clear, self-determination, realized through action, is fundamentally an act having an individual character. It is the essence of human freedom and an expression of the "individualization of nature." While acting together manifests our shared humanity, Wojtyła insists that communality does not come at the expense of individuality. Rather, it incorporates and complements the picture of human individuality by ensuring that action fundamentally belongs to a singular, responsible subject.

repeatedly condemned: collectivism, totalism, or the absorption of the person into an impersonal whole. Many will argue that this methodical reversal is going to invert personalism into its opposite. This concern is especially important when one takes into account Wojtyła's personal experience with two totalitarian regimes—National Socialism and Soviet Marxism—both of which subordinated the person to an abstract system. He repeatedly warns that alienation arises wherever social structures negate self-determination or reduce personal fulfillment to the service of systemic goals. Whenever the individual becomes subordinate to a so-called "greater whole," the system becomes inhuman. Therefore, any Community-First thesis must demonstrate a continuity with Wojtyła's opposition to totalitarianism.

The present proposal avoids this pitfall by keeping clear a decisive distinction made by Wojtyła himself: the difference between "society" as an objective network of relationships, and "community" as the experienced, lived, and subjective unity of persons (Wojtyła 2021, 394–95). Society can exist as structure; however, the community exists only via the person's participation. The Methodological Reversal will not consider the community to be an impersonal entity. Instead, it is the primordial soil within which persons encounter one another as subjects.

Therefore, the community is not just an entity. It is not a vast individual-based compound of people. The community is a collection of people working together for the betterment and growth of all individual members. To give an example of this idea: the community is the "ground," and the individuals the "plants." Although the "plant" possesses an ontologically higher status and dignity than the "ground," the "plant" cannot exist and grow independently of the "ground." (The "ground" contributes to the existence and growth of the "plant.") Likewise, in order to truly comprehend why the plant is a "higher" form of ontological being than the "ground," we must first study the "ground" to gain a better understanding of the conditions in which the plant thrives.

In this regard, one must rigorously distinguish between the metaphysical and epistemological (or personalist) aspects of the person. Metaphysically, substance always possesses primacy over relation (an accident). Relations are either necessary or contingent. Communality is a necessary relation for human flourishing in Wojtyła's thought. Nevertheless, substance ontologically precedes it, and this is why Wojtyła calls the subject *suppositum* and not *relatio*. *Ergo*, the communal aspect of personal existence never replaces the individual one. Ontologically, there is no We without an *I* and a *Thou*, yet the *Thou* is also an *I*—a someone—which gives the *We* its irreducible

dimension. The *Co-Constitutive Theory* operates primarily at the personalist level, maintaining the ontological priority of substance over relation.

The Common Good

An illuminating way to clarify this proper articulation of the community is through Wojtyła's account of the common good. As mentioned above, individuals are directed toward a common good that they all strive towards in participation. The definition of "common good" here is simply the good of the community. One can understand this in two senses.

On the one hand, it is the objective goal that the community of acting aims towards. For example, in a school context the common good of teachers and students is the fostering of good model citizens through character-formation. This shared objective provides direction and unity to communal action.

Nevertheless, what conditions that goal is the subjective understanding of the common good, which is what conditions participation. It is the principle of correct participation that corresponds to the social nature of the human person, and that enables the common action of persons to be performed authentically in a manner directed towards self-fulfillment (Ignatik 2021, 45–46). In this sense, the common good conditions participation not as coercion, but as personal realization. This understanding strengthens personalism by rearticulating the common good in subjective terms. Because participation is the capacity to share in the humanity of others while acting together for a common good, the common good will be irreducible to a collective output or social efficiency. It is a set of conditions that enables persons to fulfil themselves through responsible action.

Here, Buttiglione's observation is crucial: "there is no common good without participation" (1997, 172). The common good does not exist apart from people; it exists and can be maintained only when people actively participate in the good. In participating in the common good, an individual may give up a part of their own private good; they do not do this because they are forced to by a totalitarian system, but because they understand that self-realization often happens through self-giving. Sacrifice can only come from a person's own freedom, not compulsion.

Wojtyła makes clear that achieving the common good is not easy. Participation is voluntary and cannot be forced. The good must always be the true/genuine good; thus, it has to include both its objective content and the subjective way one relates to it. When the common good is understood in this way, it is not seen as something externally imposed. Instead, it is seen as our actual good. Consequently, the common good is not only the

orienting priority for action within a community, but also validates each individual's contribution to the community and the collective contribution of the community as a whole.

The Role of the I–Thou and the We in Personal Emergence

Another perspective that prevents collectivist misreadings of community can be found in Wojtyła's distinction between two dimensions of sociality: the inter-human relation (*I–Thou*) and the properly social dimension (*We*). This distinction ensures that the communal horizon remains grounded in personal encounter rather than in abstract structure.

The *I–Thou* relationship serves as the elementary building block of every community; it is an interaction between individuals where, according to Wojtyła, both the *I* and *Thou* are revealed as human subjects through being able to encounter one another as the center of freedom rather than an object of use (Wojtyła 2021, 493). This experience reaffirms and develops one's individuality. Rather than breaking down the sense of self, the *I–Thou* relationship provides a stronger basis for identity. When I am with another person, I can relate to them and know myself as an agent making moral decisions, because that other person cannot be converted into me or my completed self. This idea is supported by John F. Crosby when he explains that when one affirms the other's human worth, they can simultaneously have an increased awareness of their own worth (2019, 12). Thus, this is not only a sociological encounter, but also carries ontological significance.

When a plurality of persons act together for a common good, such as a team of scientists working on a cure for cancer, the We-Relationship emerges. Wojtyła teaches that the *We* does not destroy the *I*, but instead gives a different aspect and dimension to the *I*'s fulfillment. In the *We-relationship*, the I comes to understand that their own growth is inseparable from the growth of the other persons.

The subjective unity of the *We* is the natural outcome of the mature form of living together in a community. This is not the same as a group of unconscious people acting entirely without any awareness—i.e., mass psychology or anonymous crowds—nor is it simply acting together as non-persons or individuals. The *We* continues to comprise and constitute several *I*s who are complete and cannot be reduced. Therefore, the *We* as a community is not a collective or a mass: rather, it is a communion with one another.

In this sense, a community is not simply an abstract collection of people who have to conform. It provides a relational field in which the *I* can overcome its individual existence and experience; in this space, the *I* does not exist first, separate from the Thou; rather the realization of the *I* as a person

occurs inside the relational field or horizon. As the *I* learns or discovers its own *I-ness* by being addressed from the other *I* or *Thou*, the same is true concerning the *We*. As a result, each *I* can retain its identity as a distinct *I* and maintain its individuality.

Integration and Transcendence within the Communal Horizon

The foregoing analysis of the nature of community carries significant implications for the two pillars of Wojtyła's anthropology: integration and transcendence.

Integration is the process of unifying two inner experiences (somatic-vegetative dynamics and psycho-emotive dynamics) with personal freedom, leading to a single effective self (coherent identity) in order to allow for the possibility of individual acts with individual responsibility (Hołub et al. 2019, 140–41). This integration occurs in the context of community, and is either supported by a healthy community or hindered by an alienating/oppressive one. Supportive communities provide shared meanings, models of moral conduct, and stable relationships to help individuals integrate the spontaneity of their impulses into their integrated identity. Alienating/oppressive communities do not provide the supports needed in order to allow for integration of the subjective totality of the individual and, therefore, disrupt their ability to take effective action. Wojtyła argues that the extent to which communities provide the supports required by individuals to allow for integration is determined by how much support for self-determining activity the community provides through the ways in which it distorts conditions for individuals' participation in community activity (Ignatik 2021, 47). Another way of putting this is to say that integration is not the same as isolated internal psychology, but is dependent upon the supportive context of community, out of which the individual develops.

In a similar manner, the person's natural ability to transcend is realized through participation; without a community that provides meaning, the individual has no adequate expression of that ability (Acosta and Reimers 2016, 123)—so there can be no expression of transcendence in either the horizontal (intentionality/comparison towards objects) or vertical (self-determination/difference with regard to truth and/or self-values) dimensions. This is particularly important with vertical transcendence, which constitutes freedom in its fullest sense, guided by the truth about the good.

Such truth is never discovered in isolation. It is mediated through culture, tradition, and shared ethical inheritance (Acosta and Reimers 2016, 79–92). The communal horizon transmits the moral language, symbols, and

narratives through which the individual recognizes values. Self-determination thus becomes a response to a truth encountered within history, rather than an invention *ex nihilo*.

From this vantage point, transcendence itself presupposes community. The person transcends impulses not by creating values independently, but by responding to a good disclosed within a shared world. Community provides both resistance and a mirror for self-recognition: the presence of other freedoms exposes the limits of one's own freedom and calls it to responsibility. Without this encounter, transcendence would lack direction.

In the end, as Buttiglione says, one must avoid approaches that downplay the irreducibility, transcendence, or intersubjective dimension of the person (1997, 177). Taking note of this, the Co-Constitutive Theory does not put emphasis on the community over the individual. Rather, it clarifies how the lived, relational experiences of persons—their encounters, actions, and mutual recognition—are the very arena in which self-conscious subjectivity becomes fully actualized.

VI. Conclusion: Toward a Stronger Personalism

To look at the community first is not to lose the individual. It is to locate the person precisely where he or she lives: in encounter, in dialogue, and within the heart of a shared world. This investigation reaffirms the human being as a relational substance—not in the sense that relation replaces substance, but in the sense that subjectivity is catalyzed, mediated, and fulfilled within a communal horizon. The *I* remains the ontological foundation of action, yet it finds its concrete realization only within the lived reality of the *We*.

When properly articulated, a Community-First approach does not generate a monster or collapse into collectivism. The community is not an idol demanding absorption: it is the soil in which the plant—the human person—grows and bears fruit in self-fulfillment. Wojtyła himself affirms this orientation linguistically and conceptually through terms that highlight the person's inherent relational structure and ultimate orientation toward *communio personarum*. The drama of freedom, integration and transcendence does not culminate in solitary self-possession, but in communion.

By embracing a Community-First methodological horizon, contemporary scholarship may move beyond a merely cosmological framing of the person and recover a fully personalistic vision of the human subject-in-relation. Such a shift does not weaken Wojtyła's personalism: it deepens it. It articulates more explicitly what his thought already intimates: that there is no *I* without a *Thou* and no *Thou* without a *We*—yet, equally, there is no *We* without the irreducible *I* and *Thou*, each of whom remains a someone

and never a mere function of the whole. In recognizing this simultaneity, personalism becomes not less protective of the person, but more profoundly attuned to the concrete drama of human existence in the modern world.

Bibliography

Acosta, Miguel, and Adrian Reimers. 2016. *Karol Wojtyła's Personalist Philosophy: Understanding Person and Act*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Aquinas, Thomas. 2014. *Summa Theologiae*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers.

Buttiglione, Rocco. 1997. *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II*. Translated by Paolo Guietti and Francesca Murphy. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Crosby, John F. 2019. *The Personalism of John Paul II. Steubenville*, OH: Hildebrand Press.

Hołub, Grzegorz, Tadeusz Biesaga, Marek Kostur, and Jarosław Merecki. 2019. *Karol Wojtyła*. Krakow: Ignatianum University Press.

Hołub, Grzegorz. 2021. *Understanding the Person: Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła*. Edited by Bartosz Adamczewski. Vol. 29 of *European Studies in Theology, Philosophy, and History of Religions*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Ignatik, Grzegorz. 2021. *Person and Value: Karol Wojtyła's Personalistic and Normative Theory of Man, Morality, and Love*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Jaworski, Marian. 1974. "Koncepcja antropologii filozoficznej w ujęciu kard. Karola Wojtyły." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6: 89–102.

Kamiński, Stanisław. 1974. "Metodologiczne uwagi o 'Osobie i czynie'." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6: 61–75.

Kuc, Leszek. 1974. "Podmiotowość i relacja." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6: 129–45.

Kupczak, Jarosław. 2000. *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Półtawski, Andrzej. 1974. "Świadomość i działanie." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6: 117–30.

Ringor, Blaise. 2025. "Self-Gift and Gratitude: Karol Wojtyla's Personalist Ethics of Education." *Wojtyła Studies* 2 (1): 62–88. https://wojtylastudies.org/index.php/wojst/article/view/33.

Schmitz, Kenneth L. 1993. *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Stępień, Antoni B. 1974. "Fenomenologia a tomizm." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6: 103–18.

Szostek, Andrzej. 1974. "Wprowadzenie." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6: 45–58.

Wojtyła, Karol. 1974. "Słowo końcowe." *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5–6: 243–48.

—. 2013. *Love and Responsibility*. Translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

—. 2021. *Person and Act and Related Essays*. Translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. Edited by Carl A. Anderson, David S. Crawford, Nicholas J. Healy, Grzegorz Ignatik, Antonio López, FSCB, and David L. Schindler. Vol. 1 of *The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

DISCUSSIONS

Third Reply to Professor Kemp

Clarifications Regarding "Theological Humans" and the Magisterium of the Church on Human Origins

Michał Chaberek

The Misrepresentation of Augustine's Thought

First, it should be reiterated that Kemp was wrong when it comes to quoting Augustine in support of his acceptance of polygenism. As I have shown in my first critique, he misquoted the latter, as even though Augustine scorns Christians who speak nonsense about the natural world and support it with Holy Scripture, this judgement on Augustine's part applies only to things that can be "held by virtue of the most certain reasons and experience" (*certissima ratione vel experientia teneat*), and those that non-Christians had already experienced or could perceive thanks to calculations that were not doubtful (*de his rebus quas iam experiri, vel indubitatis numeris percipere potuerunt*) (*De Gen. ad Lit.*, I, 19, 39).

As I have said, genetic speculations about the original human populations not only do not meet these criteria, but could never do so, just by virtue of the sheer fact that they refer to the ancient past that cannot be recreated in any way. In fact, any questions of origins (the origin of the universe, the origin of life, the origin of species, the origin of the human race) would always evade these criteria of Augustine, simply because these are unique events that happened only once in history and cannot be observed using a strictly scientific method (even if their effects can be).

The things that do meet Augustine's criteria are those that can be measured, observed or tested in a laboratory, such as the fact that there is no spontaneous generation, that the Earth is spherical, that the Earth is in motion, or that the universe is much older than a few thousand years. That is why I gave the example of the movement of the Earth as a scientific truth that has rightly modified our interpretation of some biblical passages.

✍ Michał Chaberek, Steno Institute for Faith and Science, USA ✉ mckop@dominikanie.pl 0000-0001-8071-537X

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 87–100 Subm. 23 February 2026 Acc. 30 February 2026
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043 DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.06

In his response, Kemp says that the heliocentric model is not based on direct observation, but on inference. Yet this is sophistry of the sort that is typical of people losing the argument. I still believe that my adversary is only pretending that he cannot grasp the core of the argument, which does not rely on the word "theory" but on the straightforward distinction made by Augustine between things that are provable and those that are only stated, or simply brought forth from their (pagan) books and contrary to the Catholic faith (*Quidquid autem de quibuslibet suis voluminibus his nostris Litteris, id est catholicae fidei contrarium protulerint*) (*De Gen. ad Lit.*, I, 21, 41).

By stating that heliocentrism is not directly observed in real time, but instead is inferred directly from such direct observations in real time, Kemp does nothing to diminish my argument. Going down Kemp's path of sophistry, one could just as easily say that looking at your own hands is not a direct observation either, because you use your eyes to do it.

To sum up, Kemp misquoted Augustine by implying that the latter would give in to genetic speculations and that he would, on their basis, completely abandon the literal meaning of the first three chapters of Genesis (because this would be the actual consequence of an acceptance of such speculations). Yet Augustine consistently adheres to the literal meaning of Genesis in each of his commentaries.

What Augustine says is that Christians should not talk nonsense about the things of nature that have been established by science, as this would undermine the credibility of Christianity. But when it comes to things produced by pagans from their books—these people "who seek to slander the books our salvation depends on" (*hominibus qui calumniari Libris nostrae salutis affectant*)—if they can truly demonstrate anything about nature, we should show that they are not contrary to Scripture. However, if they bring forth anything contrary to Scripture, i.e. to the Catholic faith, we should either somehow show that they are false or believe without any doubt that these things are false.[1]

The monogenetic origin of humanity, as well as the special creation of the human body from the dust of the Earth, were considered by Augustine (and all other Holy Fathers and Doctors) a doctrine of faith. This is why he would accept heliocentrism, if presented with convincing evidence,

1. *Ut quidquid ipsi de natura rerum veracibus documentis demonstrare potuerint, ostendamus nostris Litteris non esse contrarium. Quidquid autem de quibuslibet suis voluminibus his nostris Litteris, id est catholicae fidei contrarium protulerint, aut aliqua etiam facultate ostendamus, aut nulla dubitatione credamus esse falsissimum* (*De Gen. ad Lit.*, I, 21, 41).

but would fend off the pagan challenge against monogenism even if he could not immediately respond to the so-called "genetic evidence," which is nothing more than mere speculations. I wish my adversary had chosen Augustine's path, rather than the one that consists in distorting Augustine's thought in order to defend the neo-pagan challenges against the Catholic faith.[2]

Genetic Evidence Does Not Exclude Catholic Monogenism

This takes us to my second point. As I indicated in my first critique, Kemp under-informs his audience when he states that the genetic evidence supports polygenism, and monogenism remains only as a "logical possibility." I have presented three counter-arguments that Kemp has never responded to.

First, there is a great discrepancy among biologists who speculate about the size of the initial population. This fact alone means that these speculations do not have the status of things "that can be truly demonstrated" (Augustine) that could modify our understanding of Scripture.

Second, I have shown that none of these studies exclude one initial couple on the basis of inherent genetic impossibility. The argument made by Ayala only shows that this couple would have had to live 30 mya, which would allow enough time for humanity to reach its current level of genetic diversity. In other words, every study allows for there to have been one original couple, it is just that—depending on the assumptions involved—some of studies require too much time for humanity compared to what the fossil-record shows. Again, this means that the alleged exclusion of monogenism by genetics is entirely assumption-based, and does not stem from any inherent impossibility.

Third, I have shown that there are scientific studies that actually simulate a single-couple human origin no more than 0.5 mya with the same methods as, and analogous assumptions to, those of these other studies.

This last point renders Kemp's enterprise meaningless and empty, because if a single-couple origin is actually possible, then why would any theologian wish to tinker with the traditional doctrine in the first place? To put it simply, there is no reason to look for alternative theologies, because the Catholic theology of monogenism has not been challenged by science. Indeed, it has been challenged by some ideologically driven atheists

2. Augustine calls this error on the part of certain "weaker brothers" even "more dangerous" than that of those who are so puffed up with their knowledge of secular literature that they scornfully dismiss the Biblical text as something crude and unrefined. (*De Gen. ad Lit.*, I, 20, 40)

who happen to be scientists, but this should be differentiated from a real scientific challenge. Apparently, Kemp has failed to notice the difference.

WHY TRUE HUMANS MUST BE BIOLOGICAL HUMANS, AND VICE VERSA

I don't know why my adversary poses two questions to which I have already provided quite explicit answers. First, he asks about "why, for example, he [Chaberek] does not see that showing that a term has two slightly different meanings is making a distinction, not committing an equivocation" (Kemp 2025, 295). I have answered this question in my previous paper:

> In his solution [Kemp] is not "making a distinction when faced with contradiction." (Kemp 2011, 236) Instead, he takes one term in two contradictory meanings, depending on the context. So his solution is based not on a "distinction" but on an "equivocation" that he introduces into the term "human being." A human being is a rational animal. But a "biological human" is a non-rational animal, which means it is not human. Thus, Kemp in P1 is not referring to the same reality that evolutionists are, and therefore does not resolve the contradiction: rather, he is introducing a clever form of confusion. (Chaberek 2025, 281–82)

Let me add some further explanation here. When Kemp asserts that evolution produced biological humans but not theological humans, this means that either his solution does not reconcile the so-called "science of evolution" (i.e. scientific materialism) with Catholic belief, or it means that biological humans are the same as theological humans. This must be so, because no evolutionist (including Darwin himself) would ever allow that evolution was incapable of producing "true" humans—that is, people like ourselves. Since the entire goal of Kemp's enterprise is to show the compatibility of the modern theory of the evolutionary origin of man with Catholicism, it follows that those "biological humans" must be the same as what he is referring to as "true" humans. Therefore, as I said, his solution is not based on distinction, but rather relies on a clever form of confusion or equivocation in which he takes "biological humans" to be non-rational animals with human bodies in one context while in another claiming that his model reconciles evolution with faith, which would be the case only if evolution could produce "true" humans—that is, rational animals with human bodies. Kemp needs to decide which one is true: whether his model does nothing to reconcile evolution with Christianity, and thus is an empty enterprise from the beginning, or "biological humans" are the same as "true humans," which also renders his model empty as it is based on equivocation rather than any real distinction (distinction without a difference).

His second question is about "why he [Chaberek] thinks that two different beings with different powers due to one having only a corporeal and the other a spiritual substantial form show only an accidental difference" (Kemp 2025, 295).

Again, Kemp has not read my argument carefully. Let me quote from my previous answer:

> Kemp believes that the difference between his biological man and his theological man consists in the soul rather than the body. If that were the case, the only difference would be in the soul, which would mean that the only difference between the two would be non-material, and it would boil down to possessing the faculty of reason (the theological human) vs. not having it (biological human). But possessing or not possessing either this or some other faculty constitutes not a substantial, but an accidental, difference (even if the faculty is of such prominence as reason). This means that the difference between the two (i.e., the biological and the theological human) consists of an accidental difference, not a substantial one.
>
> To be sure, I grant that Kemp says that there is a new substance in the theological man, but the "novelty" of the "new substance" is reduced to the faculty of reasoning, which contradicts the very notion of a substantial form. So, nominally he claims that the rational soul is a substantial form, but actually he reduces it to a faculty that is an accident. And this means that the difference between the theological and the biological man is actually only accidental, such that there is no new substantial form in the (theological) human, in contradiction to the teachings of the Council of Vienne and Lateran V. (Chaberek 2025, 283–84)

A Response to Three Points of Critique

In his latest reply, Kemp presents three points in opposition to my critique of the division into "true" and merely "biological" humans.

In making his first point, he writes that I seem "to think that human beings have no adaptations conducive to survival and therefore depend entirely on their rationality" (2025, 297), and that "Chaberek's second mistake is his claim that the human body has no physiological adaptations that contribute to survivability" (2025, 298).

Here, Kemp again (as is his custom) pretends not to have understood my argument. My position clearly implies that humans have no survival adaptations relative (compared) to non-rational animals. Kemp, however, speaks about adaptations taken in an absolute sense. It is obvious that not

only humans and all other animals, but even dead things have multiple adaptations for survivability. For instance, a piece of rock can resist exposure to sunlight, so that it does not melt like a piece of ice. In this sense a piece of rock has some type of survival adaptation. In this meaning, even human nails could be considered a survival feature: after all we can scratch off dirt or open a box using them. But this is nothing compared to animal claws or hooves. And this is also why Kemp's reference to the human fist is mistaken. Surely, the fist would prove helpful in the context of fighting amongst humans, but it would not count for anything against horses' hooves or lions' claws. Humans are defenseless relative to predators, and they have little survival advantage compared to animals that are typically hunted by other animals (deer, mice, etc.).

So, my premise directed against merely biological humans stands. The reason why such creatures could never exist is that on the one hand they do not have a bodily structure geared towards survivability, and on the other they do not have reason (which comes only with the human soul), where the latter is needed to produce the tools and weapons that allow them to survive.

Even so, Kemp naively believes that behavioral patterns could make up for that deficiency. He writes:

> [Chaberek's mistake] is his paying exclusive attention to "adaptations in … bodily structure," as though nothing in an animal's behavioral repertoire could contribute to survivability. In fact, some of the very features which zoologists would list as adaptations in the primates I just mentioned are features that we human beings also have—sociability, resilience in the face of environmental variation, and complex communication patterns. Since those traits (at the animal level) are not dependent on rationality, there is no reason to doubt that merely biological human beings had them as well. (Kemp 2025, 298)

This argument betrays a strategy—typical of evolutionists—of "hiding the evidence where it cannot be found." When Darwin could not find the fossils that would substantiate his theory, he ruled that they must be hidden under the ocean beds. (Since then, we have searched through the ocean beds, but those fossils haven't been found). Another example of such a strategy is the theory of punctuated equilibrium. Stephen Jay Gould knew that species have no evolutionary ancestry in the fossil record: instead, they just pop up from nowhere. In order to resolve this conundrum he said that species evolve rapidly in ecological niches (such as ocean depths, or isolated valleys) and due to the speed and isolation of these evolutionary

events we do not find any trace of them in the fossil record. His theory was, rightly, almost universally rejected, because it is just a dodge—we do not find the evidence, so we say that the evidence is undetectable.

The same type of heuristic strategy is being adopted here by Kemp: we know that the human body has no survival or protective adaptations, so let's look elsewhere—for instance, in "behavioral repertoire." Any specifics? No. Surely, we can also imagine that "merely biological humans" survived, because divine providence protected them from being killed off by predators. They acquired enough food because, providentially, there was always a tree with healthy fruit around—or an antelope that had broken its leg, so that they were capable of capturing it without designing sophisticated traps or tools to catch it. But again, such arguments are nothing but blurry speculations and anecdotes. There is no evidence that mere sociability or resilience to environmental change would permit survival. On the contrary, all we know about nature tells us that animals survive thanks to their bodily structure, and humans thanks to the tools they create.

Moreover, if biological humans were capable of survival without making tools, why would "true" humans ever have started to create them? Once they had acquired reason, why behave irrationally by engaging in such completely unnecessary exertions? On Kemp's account, the bodily structure of biological and theological humans is the same. If, therefore, biological humans can survive without making tools, why—as a matter of fact—cannot theological humans survive without creating them? Kemp's reasoning does not make much sense.

At the same time, there is a more fundamental problem with the entire "evolution of the body, creation of the soul" hypothesis: it necessarily implies a kind of Cartesian dualism with respect to human beings. Specifically, such a dualism pervades Kemp's thinking, according to which the human body may be animated either by a non-human or a human soul. In fact, given that the soul is the substantial form of the body (which I pointed out in my previous response), there must be perfect compatibility between the soul and the body. Since there is a substantial difference between the rational soul and the animal soul, there must be a substantial difference between the bodies as well. But on Kemp's account the animal and the human bodies are virtually identical.

There are many features pertaining to the human body that perfectly correspond to, and—in a way—imply or require, the human (i.e. rational) soul. Humans, for instance, possess an extraordinary degree of dexterity in their hands (as evinced by their highly developed ability to manipulate objects). Obviously, this bodily feature reflects the needs of the rational

soul, which thanks to the power of reason can use the entire potential of this trait in the creation of all kinds of things, performing all kinds of activities—even for purposes of communication.

And yet, in "merely biological humans" such dexterity would never be adequately utilized. Apes do not have dexterity, but they have strength in their hands, which matches their animal soul, where the latter works on instinct rather than involving creativity. Merely biological humans would also operate on the basis of their instincts, so they would need strength rather than dexterity. That means their bodily structure would be inappropriate for receiving their animal (sensory) soul.

Aquinas says that humans exhibit the greatest harmony across their senses. This is so that the experiences coming from the body can adequately furnish "material" for thinking. But animals have no such harmony (for instance, they exhibit a predominance of one sense over others)—something which makes instinctual operations more effective but at the same time means that such experiences would undermine the ability to think properly. Again, this means that "biological humans" could not operate on the basis of the instincts, because their senses would provide material for rational rather than spontaneous operations. The list of such "psychological," behavioral, or structural incompatibilities could be extended further, but the point is that Kemp's proposal is untenable in the light of Catholic anthropology, as it is driven by a Cartesian dualism of body and soul, implying that the human body can be animated by a non-human soul.

In my paper on the origin of man (Chaberek and Carleial 2022, 249–87), I point to one fundamental feature of the human organism that implies rationality: This feature is human bipedalism. It is unique in the animal world, because humans are the only animals that use just two out of four functional limbs in normal locomotion. This, however, results in an ineffective way of moving around. According to a study, humans are 27% less energetically effective compared to mammals of similar size (Wayman 2012). In nature, that would spell imminent death. Nevertheless, humans thrive and outcompete other animals due to their production of all kinds of tools. Human locomotion, which leaves two limbs virtually free, allows for the use of all kinds of tools and weapons during movement. So, we can make an inference from bipedalism to rationality, and from rationality to humanity. This means that wherever we encounter the human form of bipedalism we are dealing with a rational animal: i.e. a human. Once again, Kemp's "biological human" is shown to be a non-starter—due to bipedal locomotion, which can only exist in combination with reason.

Setting out his second point, Kemp writes:

> Chaberek objects that the difference between merely biologically human beings and fully human beings is scientifically undetectable. (Chaberek 2025, 286) . . . Rational beings can generally be distinguished from non-rational beings by their behavior (e.g., use of language). The fact that this is not yet true in infancy (or perhaps not at all in other cases of severe cognitive disability) just shows that not everything of importance can be established by science. Since the merely biological human beings are long gone, it is not entirely clear what moral problems he thinks come with my ideas; he does not say. The only thing I can think of is the level of respect due to fossil bones. (2025, 298)

I do not see how this point challenges what I myself have been asserting. Kemp is actually agreeing with me when he says that "not everything of importance can be established by science." In my critique, I said the following:

> Kemp consistently draws on distinctions such as that of the "biological human" vs. the "theological human." Does this mean that humanity (what he calls "full" or "true" humanity) is scientifically undetectable? If it is detectable, then how? If the real (theological) humans differ from the unreal (biological) ones only by virtue of their soul, then how can that difference be scientifically established?
>
> Obviously, science defines humans as what they are on the basis of biological features: they are those beings that have the human genome and phenotype and are born from other humans. But on Kemp's account, one cannot tell the difference, because biological and theological humans are biologically identical. I shall not even mention any of the moral problems that come with his ideas. (Chaberek 2025, 286)

It should be noted that by "science" I meant natural science—e.g., biology. Now, while it would be possible to establish the difference between a rational and a non-rational animal by means of the social, or perhaps the psychological, sciences (based on, for instance, the ability to speak), this kind of criterion will not be satisfactory, because it leaves out those "true" humans who—for whatever reason—cannot speak, or manifest any of the rational activities. As I said, science (biology) establishes humanity based on the human body (the genotype, the phenotype, and the fact of being born from other humans). Once this criterion is abandoned—and it must be relinquished in the case of the division into biological and theological humans—we are left with no means of distinguishing "true" humans from "biological" ones.

The only thing Kemp finds consolation in is his supposition that those biological humans became extinct long ago. We can infer the latter, because we do not encounter "merely biological humans" today. But this is circular reasoning: we do not encounter them, because they became extinct, and they must have become extinct, as we do not encounter them. The correct, non-circular formulation is that we do not encounter them either because they went extinct or because they never existed.

The third point that Kemp makes begins with his statement that I "claim their (biological humans') existence is contrary to Church teaching" (Kemp 2025, 299). I did not say such a thing. What I said was that their existence was impossible for biological and metaphysical reasons. But, indeed, the solemn teaching of the Church on the substantiality of the human soul implies that the concept of "biological humans" contradicts that teaching for the same reasons that their existence is metaphysically impossible.

Kemp then goes on to claim that "merely traditional beliefs can be called into question, indeed sometimes be modified or even abandoned, in the face of sufficiently convincing inference" (Kemp 2025, 300). As an example, he points to Pius XII's *Humani Generis*. However, both parts of his claim are mistaken.

Firstly, this is because Pius XII did not "call into question" or "abandon" the traditional belief (i.e. belief in the direct creation of man according to his body and soul). Rather, the Pope gave implicit permission to have debates in the Church regarding this important matter. The Pope also explained his decision thus:

> Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose grave duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth…, cannot afford to ignore or neglect these more or less erroneous opinions. Rather they must come to understand these same theories well, both because diseases are not properly treated unless they are rightly diagnosed, and because sometimes even in these false theories a certain amount of truth is contained, and, finally, because these theories provoke more subtle discussion and evaluation of philosophical and theological truths. (Pius XII 1950, 9)

Moreover, Pius XII sets no fewer than four conditions that any Catholic debate must meet. These are:

1. The arguments of both sides must be seriously considered.
2. One cannot present the evolutionary hypothesis as a proven fact.

3. One should always take into account the decisions of the Church.
4. Catholic scholars cannot act as if the sources of divine revelation did not contain anything that would demand the greatest moderation and caution regarding this matter (Pius XII 1950, 36).

If, in *Humani Generis*, Pius XII were "calling into question" the traditional belief (as Kemp holds), he would definitely not demand that the arguments of both sides be presented, nor would he forbid considering the evolutionary hypothesis proven. For some reason, Catholic evolutionists in general are incapable of grasping the straightforward meaning of this document.

Secondly, Kemp is wrong because there was no "sufficiently convincing inference" regarding the evolutionary origin of the human body in Pius XII's times, and many doubt that there is anything like that today. What does Kemp mean by "sufficiently convincing inference"? That he himself is "sufficiently convinced" does not mean that the evidence is sufficiently convincing. Evolutionists believe in evolution regardless of whether there is evidence for it or not—or even regardless of mounting evidence against it. Creationists do not need to care about scientific evidence either, because no natural phenomenon can disprove the supernatural work of God.[3] Ultimately, the debate is over one's beliefs rather than the scientific evidence. What Pius XII was actually faced with was not "sufficiently convincing inference," but the fierce materialist propaganda spread by atheists at universities, in both biology and philosophy departments. Regrettably, some "weaker brothers" (to use Augustine's phrase) succumbed to that propaganda, influencing the Pope so that he opened up the debate, which itself immediately moved away from what the Pope had permitted to be discussed (i.e. the origin of the human body) to what he had explicitly forbidden to be discussed (i.e. polygenism).

Kemp believes that "T3 [The body of Adam was a product of evolution], although contrary to a traditional belief, was recognized as theologically

3. By this I mean that even if there were a chain of fossils leading from apes to humans, and even if we were able to trace all the genetic mutations and other changes that led to the emergence of man—currently there is not even a possibility for anything like that to be traced—the first man, Adam, could still have been created *de novo*. Similarly, there is overwhelming scientific evidence that dead people do not rise from the grave, and that virgins do not give birth. Nevertheless, Catholics believe that such unique events took place outside of the ordinary course of nature, thanks to divine power working beyond the laws of nature. The same attitude should be adopted when it comes to the origin of the first man: normally, humans are born naturally from their parents, but the first man was created directly by God, outside of the order of nature.

acceptable both by Pius XII and by St. John Paul II" (Kemp 2025, 296). I've just shown that it was not recognized as theologically acceptable by Pius XII. Rather, it was permitted to be discussed, with the implication that the Church would pass judgement in the future.

Now, regarding John Paul II: Kemp refers to two texts—a catechesis from 1986, and the Address to PAS from 1996. I shall be leaving aside the latter, as it does not introduce anything new and has no bearing on our debate. In the catechesis, however, the Pope states that "it can be said that, from the viewpoint of the doctrine of the faith, there are no difficulties in explaining the origin of man in regard to the body by means of the theory of evolution" (John Paul II 1986b).[4]

I do not know what the Pope was aiming to communicate, but a straightforward reading of this phrase does not allow us to conclude that he was admitting any lack of compatibility between evolution and the doctrine of faith. He is only saying that, from faith's perspective, the theory of evolution could explain the origin of the human body. So it could be that scientists find an evolutionary explanation for the origin of the human body, and that such an account does not pose any difficulties for faith. However, it does not follow that faith could not provide an alternative explanation that would trump the evolutionary one in terms of the power of belief. To use an analogy: perhaps scientists could find a physical explanation for the multiplication of loaves by Jesus and this would not be contrary to faith. Nevertheless, out of faith the believers would still be bound to hold that the multiplication did not happen by natural means, but instead was caused supernaturally by Jesus.

Surely, such an interpretation feels forced and unnatural, but if the Pope simply wanted to say that the evolutionary explanation of the human body is the true one, and that belief in the direct creation of the human body should be abandoned, then why he did not say so?

In fact, this is the problem with all utterances of Popes in recent times regarding evolution: they never define the terms, they express different reservations (in this case, "it can be said…"), and they never state the matter clearly.

Now, if we allow that the Pope meant that the evolutionary origin of the human body is not a problem for Catholic faith, this ruling, if it had

4. In his bibliography, Kemp confuses the title of the General Audience. The catechesis that was entitled "Created Things Have a Legitimate Autonomy" was delivered on April 2nd, 1986. The General Audience from April 16th, 1986, was entitled "Man is a Spiritual and Corporeal Being." The quotation I provide comes from a more precise translation of the Italian original. (John Paul II, 1986b)

greater authority, could be considered substantially novel in terms of Catholic teaching. However, it does not have any such authority.

Interestingly, I asked my adversary to judge for himself what kind of authority the solemn profession of faith pronounced officially to the universal Church by Pope Pelagius I had (Chaberek 2025, 279). So he did. According to Kemp, these two statements by John Paul II "have at least as much theological weight as Chaberek attributes to Pope Pelagius I's sixth-century letter to King Childebert" (Kemp 2025, 296, f3).[5] So, according to Kemp, the Wednesday catechesis, a pastoral text of probably the lowest possible Papal authority (barring "airplane interviews"), not only matches but could even trump the solemn profession of faith pronounced by the Pope to the universal Church. I do not think that my adversary is completely serious in passing this judgement, but if he is then he is completely wrong as well.

To summarize, the Church has never adopted, recognized or supported the evolutionary origin of the human body. Until 1950, its special creation was a part of the ordinary Church Magisterium which binds the faithful. After 1950, the Magisterium allows for a plurality of opinions without granting support to any of them. That Catholic scholars *en masse* abandoned the traditional belief means only that they did so, not that the Magisterium did. There is not a single doctrinal document that could be taken to support theistic evolution, even if only implicitly.

Given that Kemp's last response has not introduced anything new to our debate, and seeing that almost all of his responses are based on misreading my arguments and that he has started resorting to sophistry (which is always an indication of the lack of a real argument), I do not intend to deliver any further response—unless my adversary presents an argument that actually deserves one.

Bibliography

Augustine. "De Genesi ad Litteram." In *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, edited by John E. Rotelle, translated by Edmund Hill. Vol. 13, On Genesis. 168–506. New York: New City Press, 2002. Latin text after https://www.augustinus.it/latino/genesi_lettera/index2.htm

Chaberek, Michael, and Rômulo Carleial. 2022. "Human Origins Revisited: On the Recognition of Rationality and the Antiquity of the Human Race." *Studia Gilsoniana* 11 (2): 249–87. https://doi.org/10.26385/SG.110210.

5. Here, Kemp skips over the fact that the Pope's Pelagius profession of faith was not just a letter to a king, but was later pronounced to the universal Church as the papal standard of faith.

Chaberek, Michał. "The Arches and the Spandrels: A Response to Kenneth W. Kemp (2)." *Forum Philosophicum* 30 (1): 273–87.

John Paul II. "Created Things Have a Legitimate Autonomy." General Audience, 16 April 1986. In *God, Father and Creator: A Catechesis on the Creed*, 216–20. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

John Paul II. "Man Is a Spiritual and Corporeal Being." General Audience, 16 April 1986. Accessed February 10, 2026. http://www.totus2us.co.uk/teaching/jpii-catechesis-on-god-the-father/man-is-a-spiritual-and-corporeal-being/

Kemp, Kenneth. "Second Reply to Fr. Chaberek: On Why Merely Biological Humans Can Survive, and on When Merely Traditional Doctrine Can Be Abandoned." *Forum Philosophicum* 30 (2): 295-301. 10.35765/forphil.2025.3002.14

Pius XII. 1950. *Humani Generis*. Accessed February 10, 2026. https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html

Wayman, Erin, "Energy Efficiency Doesn't Explain Human Walking?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 17, 2012. Accessed February 10, 2026. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/energy-efficiency-doesnt-explain-human-walking-39161215/

The Exchange over Monogenesis:
Where Matters Stand

Kenneth W. Kemp

So, after Fr. Chaberek's three critiques of my 2011 article on monogenesis and two replies from me, it is time to bring this exchange to a close. Where do matters stand?

I wrote that article because many Catholics, having accepted the evolutionary origin of the human body, had then wondered whether that acceptance required them to reject theological monogenism.[1] The thesis of my article, and of my recent defenses of it against Fr. Chaberek's critiques in *Forum Philosophicum* (2024, 2025a), was that "scientific arguments for biological polygenism would not, no matter how strong they might be, require any revision of the Church doctrine of theological monogenism" (2025a, 300).

In defense of that thesis (i.e., as a consistency proof), I presented a *possible* scenario of anthropogenesis according to which the first fully human beings were the product of God's infusion of a created rational soul into two individuals in a larger population of evolved, "merely biologically human," beings (and then into all of their descendants). Interbreeding between those fully human beings and the merely biologically human members of the larger population would explain the genetic facts on the basis of which some scientists (saliently, Ayala and Escalante 1996) had argued for a polygenetic anthropogenesis. Or, to put the thesis in other words, "[that] scenario being scientifically possible and theologically orthodox, any scientific arguments over polygenism are theologically irrelevant" (Kemp 2024, 393).

1. I.e., that there were exactly two first human beings, the ancestors of all other human beings who ever lived.

✍ Kenneth W. Kemp, University of St. Thomas, USA ✉ KWKemp@StThomas.edu 0000-0001-7436-8746

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 101–12 Subm. 16 March 2026 Acc. 23 March 2026
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043 DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.07

Construction of that consistency proof seemed to me to be in the spirit of St. Augustine's admonitions about how Catholics should respond to science-based challenges to Catholic doctrine.

It was against that article (and its subsequent defenses) that Fr. Chaberek wrote his three critiques (2024, 2025, 2026). His account of what I was trying to do in the 2011 article (allegedly "[to] reconcile the so-called 'science of evolution' [i.e., scientific materialism] with Catholic belief" [2026, 90]), however, is incorrect. I certainly was not trying to effect a reconciliation of any kind of *materialism* with Catholic belief.[2] How could he think that, when I was so explicit about infusion of a divinely created human *soul* as a necessary component of anthropogenesis? His characterization of what I was trying to do depends on his mistaken *identification* of the science of evolution with scientific materialism. But surely when St. John Paul II said that the theory of evolution is "more than a hypothesis" (1996b, para. 4) he did not mean that *scientific materialism* was "more than a hypothesis." Also mistaken is even Chaberek's more limited claim about what evolution must include—"no evolutionist (including Darwin himself) would ever allow that evolution was incapable of producing 'true' humans, that is, people like ourselves" (2026, 90). Alfred Russel Wallace did:

> The brain of prehistoric and of savage man seems to me to prove the existence of some power, distinct from that which has guided the development of the lower animals through their ever-varying forms of being. (1870, 343)

Was he not an evolutionist? Many Catholic scientists and theologians have accepted the evolutionary origin of the human body without thinking that evolution by itself produced true human beings.[3]

2. It is perhaps this confusion that led Chaberek to think that I was committing an equivocation when I was in fact making a distinction to resolve an alleged contradiction (2026, p. 90). Let me make that logical difference more explicit.

One commits an equivocation when one presents two ideas as in fact consistent (or equivalent) despite the fact that they use a key common term in two different senses. He thinks I do this due to his misunderstanding my goal as that of reconciling Catholic theology with a comprehensively naturalist evolutionistic anthropogenesis.

One can use a distinction to resolve a contradiction by showing that two ideas use a *term* they share to refer to two different *things*, and therefore do not attribute contradictory predicates to the same subject. This is what I in fact do for the ideas at issue (the conclusion of scientific arguments for polygenesis and the Catholic theological doctrine of monogenesis) when I show that the properly scientific theses included in the theory of evolution are about the origins of biologically human beings; the theological doctrine, by contrast, is about the origin of a subset, namely, fully human beings.

3. Details are provided in my *Origin of Catholic Evolutionism* (2025b).

The differences between Fr. Chaberek and me can be summarized by reference to five theses which he asserts and I deny:

1. The evolutionary origin of the human body is contrary to Catholic doctrine.
2. Theories of evolution are beyond the reach of science.
3. The science-based arguments for polygenism are too weak to justify attempts at their reconciliation with theological doctrine.
4. The merely biologically human beings included as a necessary feature of my scenario, while not theologically problematic, are metaphysically and scientifically impossible.
5. My justification for developing my scenario misrepresents St. Augustine's advice about how to respond to differences between science and theology.

Evolution and Catholic Doctrine

Our first disagreement is about the theological acceptability of an evolutionary account of the origin of the first human body.

It was not the point of my 2011 article to offer a defense of such an account *per se*, but only to show that recent arguments for polygenism, and in particular those based on trans-species polymorphisms in man and chimpanzee (e.g. Ayala and Escalante 1996; Ayala 1998), did not constitute a basis for rejecting *theological* monogenism. Nevertheless, since Chaberek used his critiques of my article to present a larger attack on the theological orthodoxy of an even partially evolutionary anthropogenesis, the orthodoxy of the background presupposed by my scenario became a point of difference in our exchange.

Chaberek's concerns about that theological orthodoxy are not, it is important to note, about any of the distinctive features of my scenario—not about the existence of merely biologically human beings (2026, p. 96)[4] or about the occurrence of interbreeding—but rather about the fact that, allegedly contrary to definitive Catholic doctrine, it allowed evolution to play any role at all in the origin of the first human body.

In his defense of his theological anti-evolutionism, he exaggerates the doctrinal status of the passages on which he relies and minimizes the status of those which show explicit magisterial openness to the possibility of evolutionary processes playing a role in the formation of the first human body.

4. In the passage he cited (2025, 299), what I had meant was that he thinks animal ancestors are contrary to Church teaching, but he took it differently.

A case of the former is his appeal to a profession of faith which Pope Pelagius sent to King Childebert in 557. Childebert had asked Pelagius to affirm the *Tome* of St. Leo, or at least "to set forth [his] own confession of faith in [his] own words." Pelagius did both. The relevance of that confession to what is at issue here is that Pelagius, having said the resurrection of the dead would apply to "everyone born and dead from Adam to the consummation of the world," then made explicit that this applied also to Adam and Eve as well, even though "they were not born of other parents, but created, one from earth and the other from the rib of the man" (*Epistle* 15, 410B). While Chaberek is correct that Pelagius' statement is inconsistent with an even partially evolutionary anthropogenesis, it is incorrect to characterize it, as he did, as a "solemn profession of faith pronounced officially to the universal Church" (2026, 99)—something which, on the issue under discussion here, it certainly is not.

If this non-evolutionist account of anthropogenesis were infallible teaching, one wonders how St. John Paul could have said that "[his] predecessor Pius XII had already stated that there was no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of the faith about man" (1996b). Chaberek reads Pius XII differently. Pius, he says, "did not 'call into question' or 'abandon . . .' the traditional belief (i.e., the belief in the direct creation of man according to his body . . .)," but merely "gave implicit permission to have debates in the Church regarding this important matter." Why would he have done that? Chaberek quotes a passage from the encyclical: "Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose grave duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth . . ., cannot afford to ignore or neglect these more or less erroneous opinions" (2026, 96, quoting Pius XII at 1950, para. 9). That is misleading in two ways.

First, the referent of paragraph 9's "these erroneous opinions" is the philosophical points mentioned in paragraphs 5–8 (e.g., pantheism), not the very different scientific ideas (the ones at issue here) that come only much later, in paragraphs 36–37, as an inattentive reader of Chaberek's article might imagine.

Second, while it is fair to say that Pius did not simply abandon direct divine formation of the human body, to say that he did not call it into question could easily be misunderstood. He quite explicitly opened the question of the origin of the first human body for theological discussion, which is sufficient to make my point.

Pelagius' confession merely stated his best sixth-century judgment on a matter tangential to his main point. His reference to Adam was phrased in a way that was safest at the time, given the absence of any evidence to

the contrary (i.e., evidence suggesting that Genesis might reasonably be read less literalistically than had traditionally been done), and was made in the context of an attempt to resolve other theological controversies; it addressed evolution only by implication and only incidentally.

That it, or at least something like it, was also sent to the universal church is suggested elsewhere (Pelagius *Epistle* 6), but is not certain.

In light of evidence not available to Pelagius, St. John Paul offered different guidance in a Wednesday catechesis: "It can be said that, from the viewpoint of the doctrine of the faith, there are no difficulties in explaining the origin of man in regard to the body, by means of the theory of evolution" ([1986] 1996a). Neither his catechesis nor Pelagius' letter, on the point at issue, is *de fide tenenda*; each is based on the best exegesis of its day. John Paul's catechesis, one might also note, was intended (as Pelagius' was not) to address precisely the point at issue here.

Chaberek's reply? "I do not know what the Pope intended to say"! Then, "it does not follow that faith could not provide an alternative explanation that would trump the evolutionary one in terms of the power of belief" (2026, 98). Well, that's *partly* true, but it bears an uncanny resemblance to what Urban VIII said to Galileo in his unfortunate reluctance to recognize that good arguments for or against heliocentrism could resolve that earlier controversy: "It must suffice for us to say that angels could be moving the celestial bodies" (Galileo [1624] 1903, 183). While it is true that Chaberek's rejection of evolutionary anthropogenesis is better grounded in traditional theology than were Urban's reservations about the motion of the Earth, in the end neither he nor Urban has a trump card here. "Faith" can always provide an explanation alternative to a scientific one in the sense that God can always do directly what He has also given nature the capacity to do, but to trump the evolutionary explanation the faith to which appeal is made would have to be faith in something more definitive than any teaching that Chaberek has available. Merely traditional doctrine will not do, for reasons that I have already articulated (2025a, 300).

Chaberek's question, "if the Pope simply wanted to say that the evolutionary explanation of the human body is the true one, and that belief in the direct creation of the human body should be abandoned, then why he didn't say so?" (2026, 98), has an easy answer: compatibility (or not) of scientific ideas with Catholic doctrine is within the competence of the magisterium; their *truth* (presuming compatibility), by contrast, is not.

Another statement on the theological acceptability of a partially evolutionary anthropogenesis, again one of authority at least comparable to that of a letter to a king, St. John Paul's address to the Pontifical Academy

of Sciences, Chaberek leaves aside, because "it does not introduce anything new and has no bearing on our debate." St. John Paul thought otherwise:

> Taking into account the state of scientific research at the time as well as of the requirements of theology, the encyclical *Humani Generis* considered the doctrine of "evolutionism" a serious hypothesis, worthy of investigation and in-depth study equal to that of the opposing hypothesis. . . . Today, almost half a century after the publication of the encyclical, *new knowledge has led to the recognition* of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis. (1996b, para. 4, with emphasis added)

Of course, if an even partially evolutionary anthropogenesis is unorthodox, then my scenario would be so as well, but recent magisterial statements with at least as much authority as Pelagius' letter once had assure us that the evolutionary origin of the human body is not theologically objectionable.

Evolution and Science

Fr. Chaberek and I disagree about how science works and, consequently, about what it can achieve. We agree with St. Augustine's idea that the kind of natural knowledge at issue here is grounded in *ratio et experientia*.

Chaberek, I think, fails to appreciate the extent to which *ratio* (here, scientific inference) can take us beyond mere observation and measurement to the acceptance of sufficiently powerful explanations (e.g., the heliocentric structure of the solar system, the atomic nature of matter, the historical origins of things) (see McMullin 1992). Such reasoning, though it does not provide *mathematical* certainty, can provide a certainty sufficient to require that it be taken into consideration in the interpretation of Scripture, as well as in the retention or revision of merely traditional (i.e., not *explicitly* revealed) doctrines. It can meet, that is to say, St. Augustine's requirement of *certissimitudo* in the context of mixed questions to which both science and theology are relevant.

Chaberek seems to limit science to ideas "that can be measured, observed or tested in the laboratory," though exactly what that means becomes unclear in light of his acceptance of the motion of the Earth and the age of the Universe.

In response to my saying that our judgment that the Earth moves around the Sun is inferential and only indirectly observational, he accuses me of sophistry, implying that we would then have to say the same about our knowledge that we have two hands (2026, 88). We do see our two hands directly, but when did we (from where *could* we) make a similar observation

about the Earth revolving around the Sun? We correctly *conclude* that it does, but only on the basis of *other* observations (e.g., retrograde motion of the superior planets) from which we *infer* that we are overtaking them as we move along an inside circumsolar orbit.

Does the observation of variation in relative star positions (stellar parallax), recognized in principle as an implication of the motion of the Earth already in the sixteenth century though finally detected only in the 1830s (e.g., Bessel 1838), count as a *test* of heliocentrism? It does, of course, but paleontological discoveries that fill gaps in the fossil record (e.g., the discovery of Tiktaalik; see Daeschler, Shubin and Jenkins 2006; Shubin 2009, 3–27) do so for the theory of the evolutionary origin of species as well.

Chaberek does not tell us why he thinks that the Universe is very old. It cannot be because of observation or testing in a laboratory. The reason for thinking, contrary to a once widely held theological belief, that the Universe is very old is that it is the best explanation of observations (of other things) that we can make—on the basis, that is to say, of the very kind of argument that he refuses to accept, in principle, for the evolutionary origin of species.

So, I think that science can often provide information about the past with a reasonable degree of certainty and that, when it *seems* to do so in a way that might be deployed against Catholic doctrine, it is the responsibility of Catholic intellectuals to show how the ideas in question can be reconciled. Chaberek, by contrast, thinks that although science can tell us that the universe is very old, it can tell us nothing (nothing about evolution, anyway) about the past itself (2026, 87).

Science, Polygenism, and Theological Notice

The case for biological (not theological) polygenesis on which I relied (Ayala and Escalante 1996)[5] is based on the observation (and explanation) of trans-species polymorphisms (distinct nucleotide *strings* at a single gene locus). Chaberek dismisses Ayala's argument, despite its having been accepted for publication in *Nature*, with only the remark that it had been "challenged by other scholars" (2024, 157). It was, however, taken seriously enough to warrant Ayala's invitation to address the American bishops on the topic (Ayala 1998). That seemed to make it a reasonable focus for my work. In addition, as I went on to point out, denying that Ayala's arguments

5. This argument is different from the arguments from an intraspecific human genetic diversity against which he deploys his scientific objections (2026, 89). The latter has, to be sure, been used by *other* Catholics discussing this question (e.g., Austriaco et al. 2016, 226–27). My consistency proof covers both lines of scientific argument.

are in fact scientifically sound does not affect my thesis that even if it, or similar, arguments *were* sound they would not constitute a challenge to theological monogenesis (2024, 292).

METAPHYSICS, BIOLOGY, AND MERELY BIOLOGICAL HUMAN BEINGS

My scenario includes (indeed requires) a distinction between the beings discussed in scientific arguments (biologically human beings) and those to which theological doctrine pertains (theologically human beings).[6] The latter is a subset of the former, meaning that some beings might be biologically, but not theologically, hence "merely biologically," human. Such beings would have all the animal powers that we have, but not the rational powers. They would have, that is to say, the animal souls that are produced in whatever way other animal souls are produced, but not the rational souls that can only be the product of individual divine acts of creation.

Whether there could be any merely biologically human beings of the kind my scenario requires is another point of difference between Chaberek and me. Chaberek says that he has raised no *theological* objection to the possible existence of such beings (2026, 96). He says, however, that the idea faces two other kinds of problem.

The first is philosophical—the idea that there could be such beings amounts to Cartesian dualism (2026, 93–94).[7] He thinks that there must be a one-to-one correspondence between kinds of bodies and kinds of souls. The possibility of a body like ours being informed either by a merely animal soul or by a rational soul is, however, plausible once one realizes that rationality is not a power of any bodily organ. A substantial form (a soul) could make possible all the sensory, appetitive and locomotive powers associated with human being without being able to abstract concepts as well. Another kind of substantial form (or soul) could actualize all those powers and, *in addition*, bestow the power of reason. Either would be a possible substantial form of the same kind of material body. The scenario is no more dualist than is the Catholic doctrine that the human body is informed by a *subsistent* form, or than the Thomistic idea that the rational soul is not the power of any bodily organ.

Chaberek's philosophical critique of the possibility of merely biologically human beings is, therefore, unsound.

6. On Chaberek's charge of equivocation here, see note 2 above.

7. In this, he is incorrect. What makes Cartesian anthropology dualist is its thesis that man's material body and his spiritual soul are distinct *substances*. On my account, the rational soul is *not* a separate substance but only the substantial form of the human body (2011, 235; 2020, 145–46). It is, therefore, in complete conformity with the doctrine taught by the Council of Vienne.

Chaberek also thinks that, for two reasons, these beings are biologically impossible. That is the next point of difference between us.

First, he claims that, philosophically problematic or not, such merely biologically human beings would lack the features necessary to their survival as a species. He never explains why such beings would be any worse off than baboons and vervet monkeys, species that do survive in a world full of leopards, eagles, and snakes. I listed some of the specific behavioral features that we share with those baboons and monkeys—sociability, resilience in the face of environmental variation, and complex communication patterns (2025a, 298). To his denial that those count as specifics,[8] he added that "all we know about nature tells us that animals survive thanks to their bodily structure" (2026, 93). I cannot imagine why he thinks that an animal species' behavior is irrelevant to its prospects for survival, but I tried to accommodate his concern by pointing to two bodily features conducive to survival that are unique to man—fists and throwing arms (2025a, 298). He objects that fists "would not count for anything against horse's hooves [?—KWK] or lions' claws" (2026, 92), forgetting that lions' claws would not do anything to protect against a stone thrown at 30 meters. Merely biologically human beings would not be invulnerable, but they would hardly be "defenseless relative to predators."

Second, Chaberek argues that "there are many features pertaining to the human body that . . . —in a way—imply or require the human (i.e., rational) soul" (2026, 93)[9]—manual dexterity, for example, a "harmony in the senses," and bipedalism, but his argument does not show that this is so. None of these features establish what he claims.

The fact that "the power of reason can use the entire potential of [such dexterity] in the creation of all kinds of things" does not show that it would be of *no* use to non-rational beings.

The connection between a harmony in the senses and rationality is grounded in his claim that although the alternative, "predominance of one sense over others," "makes instinct[ual] operations more effective, [it] . . . would ruin the ability to think properly." That harmony is necessary for "experiences coming from the body [to] serve as 'material' for human thinking." He gives no reason to think that effective instinctual operations (and certainly not animal life itself) require such predominance, nor that

8. If he wants more specificity, he can begin with Cheney and Seyfarth (1990).

9. His point here is that for merely biological human beings to count as being even biologically human, they would have had to have features that he thinks are incompatible with the absence of rationality.

it would make thinking impossible. Neither does he say why predominance and harmony cannot be matters of degree. Not having been given any reason to do otherwise, I doubt all of that; the burden of proof here is on him.

Finally, does at least bipedalism imply rationality? He cites here a popular science magazine (Wayman 2012) as saying: "Humans are 27% less energetically effective compared to mammals of similar size . . . . In nature that would spell imminent death" (2026, 94). That is not quite correct. His source, and its scholarly source (Halsey and White 2012), say this only of running, walking being more efficient (as Chaberek acknowledges in his more careful review of the popular article; see Chaberek and Carleial 2022), even if running is less so. His argument that "that would spell imminent death" presupposes that running away from fast predators is more important than any other function of locomotion and than any benefits that might accrue from other uses to which forelimbs can be put. A review of the scientific literature (e.g., Lewin 1998, 215–28; Niemitz 2010) reveals a number of other functions of locomotion (e.g., foraging over large areas, wading), and other possible benefits of bipedalism. Those functions and benefits, which might well outweigh the risks of some members of the species being eaten by fast predators, do not require rationality.

Following St. Augustine

The difference between Chaberek and me on this final point centers on the criterion of *certissimitudo*. What counts as "very certain," or, to focus on what is at issue here, when is a scientific idea *sufficiently certain* to allow open discussion (if not reconsideration) of theological doctrines?

We agree that no degree of scientific confidence in an idea inconsistent with doctrines *de fide tenenda* would permit such reconsideration, or even (*I* think) make it reasonable to give official approval to open discussion.

We apparently agree that theological doctrine must at least sometimes require modification in light of scientific research, since he says that what Catholics should believe in theological matters "might require some modification in understanding if it clashed with hard facts" (2024, 164; 2025, 274).

I think we disagree about how to apply this—that he is insufficiently appreciative of the force of scientific reasoning and overly deferential towards what are in fact merely traditional theological beliefs. The point that seems to remain at issue is the level of certainty sufficient to justify raising questions about traditional doctrines that are not *de fide tenenda*. I showed (2025a, 300) that serious, evidence-based and widely held scientific ideas sufficed for Pius XII.

We in any case disagree on how all this applies to the origin of the human race, but what science can do, and the theological note of certainty about the origin of the human body, I discussed above.

I think that I have followed St. Augustine's advice about what to do when critics are able to prove from reliable evidence that some fact of physical science is contrary to our Scripture—by showing that it is not (*De Genesi*, 1.21.41).

The evolutionary origin of the human body was officially recognized as a theologically open question in a papal encyclical published over seventy years ago. Chaberek denies that the *distinctive* feature of my scenario, the possible existence of merely biologically human beings, is *theologically* problematic. So, my deployment of the scenario as a consistency proof is not, despite Chaberek's protests to the contrary, a revision of doctrine *de fide tenenda* on the basis of insufficiently grounded scientific claims. Indeed it is not anything "contrary to Scripture, that is to Catholic faith."

Conclusion

So, that's where the controversy sits. At this point, I think, the verdict can be left to the judgment of readers.

Bibliography

Augustine. (415) 1982. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Vol. 1. Translated by John Hammond Taylor, SJ. New York: Newman. First published as *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*.

Austriaco, Nicanor Pier Giorgio, et al. 2016. *Thomistic Evolution: A Catholic Approach to Understanding Evolution in the Light of Faith*. Providence, RI: Cluny Media.

Ayala, Francisco J. 1998. "Evolution and the Uniqueness of Humankind." *Origins: CNS Documentary Service* 27 (34): 565–574.

Ayala, Francisco J., and Escalante, A.A. 1996. "The Evolution of Human Populations: A Molecular Perspective." *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 5 (1): 188–201. https://doi.org/10.1006/mpev.1996.0013.

Bessel, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1838. "Bestimmung der Entfernung des 61sten Sterns des Schwans." *Astronomische Nachrichten* 16 (5): 65–96. Ed. and trans. John Herschel, "A letter from Professor Bessel to Sir J. Herschel, Bart., dated Konigsberg, Oct. 23, 1838." *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 4 (17): 152–61. https://doi.org/10.1093/mnras/4.17.152.

Chaberek, Michał, and Rômulo Carleial. 2022. "Human Origins Revisited: On the Recognition of Rationality and the Antiquity of the Human Race." *Studia Gilsoniana* 11 (2): 249–287. https://doi.org/10.26385/SG.110210.

Chaberek, Michał. 2024. "Original Sin, Monogenesis and Human Origins: A Response to Kenneth W. Kemp." *Forum Philosophicum* 29 (1): 153–165. https://doi.org/10.35765/forphil.2024.2901.08.

—. 2025. "The Arches and the Spandrels: A Response to Kenneth W. Kemp (2)." *Forum Philosophicum* 30 (1): 273–287. https://doi.org/10.35765/forphil.2025.3001.13.

—. 2026. "Third Reply to Prof. Kemp: Clarifications on "Theological Humans" and the Magisterium of the Church on Human Origins." Forum Philosophicum 3 (1): 87–100.

Cheney, Dorothy L., and Robert M. Seyfarth. 1990. *How Monkeys See the World: Inside the Mind of Another Species*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Daeschler, Edward B., Neil H. Shubin, and Farish A. Jenkins Jr. 2006. "A Devonian Tetrapod-Like Fish and the Evolution of the Tetrapod Body Plan." *Nature* 440: 757–63. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature04639.

Galileo. 1903. "Letter to Federico Cesi of 6 June 1624." In *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. 13, 182–183. Florence: Barbera.

Halsey, L.G., and White, C.R. 2012. "Comparative Energetics of Mammalian Locomotion: Humans Are Not Different." *Journal of Human Evolution* 63 (5): 718–722. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhevol.2012.07.008.

John Paul II. (1986) 1996a. "Created Things Have a Legitimate Autonomy." General Audience, 16 April 1986. In *God, Father and Creator: A Catechesis on the Creed*, 216–20. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

—. 1996b. Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. In *Origins: CNS Documentary Service* 26 (25): 414–6.

Kemp, Kenneth W. 2011. "Science, Theology, and Monogenesis." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85 (2): 217–236. https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq201185213.

—. 2020. "God, Evolution and the Body of Adam." *Scientia et Fides* 8 (2): 139–172. https://doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2020.017.

—. 2024. "Monogenism: A Reply to Fr. Chaberek." *Forum Philosophicum* 29 (2): 391–399. https://doi.org/10.35765/forphil.2024.2902.09.

—. 2025a. "Second Reply to Fr. Chaberek: On Why Merely Biological Humans Can Survive, and on When Merely Traditional Doctrine Can Be Abandoned." *Forum Philosophicum* 30 (2): 295–301. https://doi.org/10.35765/forphil.2025.3002.14.

—. 2025b. *The Origins of Catholic Evolutionism, 1831–1950*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Lewin, Roger. 1998. *Principles of Human Evolution: A Core Textbook*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Science.

McMullin, Ernan. 1992. *The Inference that Makes Science: The Aquinas Lecture 1992*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.

Niemitz, Carsten. 2010. "The Evolution of the Upright Posture and Gait—A Review and a New Synthesis." *Naturwissenschaften* 97 (3): 241–263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00114-009-0637-3.

Pelagius. (557) 1848a. "Letter to King Childebert (Epistle 15 [formerly 16])." In *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 69, edited by J.-P. Migne, "Epistolae," 408B–410D. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique.

—. (ca. 557) 1848b. "Letter to All the People of God (Epistle 6 [formerly 7])." In *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 69, edited by J.-P. Migne, "Epistolae," 399A–400D. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique.

Shubin, Neil. 2009. *Your Inner Fish*. New York: Vintage.

Wallace, Alfred Russel. 1870. *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection*. New York: Macmillan.

Wayman, Erin. "Energy Efficiency Doesn't Explain Human Walking?" *Smithsonian Magazine*, 17 September 2012. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/energy-efficiency-doesnt-explain-human-walking-39161215

Franciszek Bargieł SJ: Adalbertus (Wojciech) Tylkowski SJ (1624–1695) and His *Philosophia curiosa*

Jacek Surzyn

Abstract This issue features a translation of another paper by Franciszek Bargieł SJ, this time dedicated to the profile of another Jesuit philosopher, Adalbertus (Wojciech) Tylkowski. The article was originally published in Latin in Forum Philosophicum 7, (2002): 239–51. It has since been translated into English.

About the Translation

Translation is never merely replacing words in one language with those of another. My guiding maxim is St. Jerome's statement, in his letter to Pammachius, that a translator renders not words but meanings. A translator therefore conveys an intelligible message, not a mere string of semantically equivalent words. In every translation the source words are signs pointing to a larger end: to reproduce, in another language, the argument, style, and thought of the original. Because languages map the world differently, the translator must at times alter form to preserve function. Faithfulness to meaning may therefore require departures from the original word order, syntax, or idiom.

This principle has guided my work. Franciszek Bargieł's Latin text has been translated here into English with attention not only to literal accuracy but, above all, to the author's intended sense. Bargieł writes in the scholastic and Jesuit tradition, in which precision of definition and rigour of argument matter as much as manner of expression. My translation aims to highlight both. Latin and English differ in their preferred sentence structures. Bargieł frequently uses complex periodic sentences, suspending key predicates until the final clause. English does not tolerate such structures well. Where length and complexity would hinder understanding, I have split them into several

✍ Jacek Surzyn, Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland ✉ jacek.surzyn@ignatianum.edu.pl 🆔 0000-0001-7959-243X

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 113–32 Subm. 5 November 2025 Acc. 12 November 2025
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043 DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.08

sentences. This is an interpretative choice that preserves the argumentative structure while removing a barrier arising from syntactic differences alone. Orthography and Latin proper names follow standard contemporary conventions. Philosophical terms are rendered with established English equivalents; where no adequate equivalent exists, the Latin is retained, and Greek terms are given in transliteration. This posed no major difficulties, since most English philosophical vocabulary is calqued from Latin or, in part, from Ancient Greek.

My decisions rest on two complementary principles. First, functional equivalence: the English should give readers an understanding comparable to that intended for the author's educated Latin audience, given the resources of English and changed conditions of reception. Second, preservation of style: Bargieł writes a highly scholasticised Latin shaped by scholastic method and, above all, Jesuit pedagogy. The tension between accessibility and historical texture is real. I resolve it case by case, asking what each passage does (definition, inference, admonition) and then choosing the degree of modernization that preserves its effect without concealing its origin.

A few words about Bargieł's style. He writes with the calm confidence of a trained Jesuit debater. He presents Tylkowski and his views matter-of-factly, without delving into detail. The aim is to present the largely unknown Jesuit philosopher and theologian Wojciech Tylkowski in a concise outline. In English, I have sought to preserve this rhythm. The division into numbered sections and paragraphs remains that of the original. Bargieł prepared this article as an abridgement of his longer Polish study of Tylkowski, which also shapes its style.

Finally, I reiterate St. Jerome's rule, which has guided me: "I do not translate word for word, but sense for sense." (*Non verbum e verbo, sed sensum de sensu.*) Adopting this maxim, I have striven to remain faithful to the meaning and argument of the original while allowing them to live in English. If the wording or structure occasionally deviates from the Latin, it is to maintain a deeper correspondence of meaning and intent. That correspondence, not mechanical sameness, is the true measure of accuracy. By that measure, I hope this translation preserves the clarity, logic, and precision of Bargieł's text.

A Very Short History of the Jesuit Order in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The Society of Jesus, founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, rapidly became one of the most influential orders in the Catholic Church, combining intense pastoral and missionary work with a rigorously standardized educational

programme (O'Malley 1993, 6). The early Constitutions and the Exercises shaped a disciplined corporate identity oriented to service "for the greater glory of God," but by the turn of the century the order's distinctive public face was the school. *The Ratio Studiorum* (finalized in 1599) codified curricula, teaching methods (*lectures*, *praelectiones*, *disputations*), classroom management, and a hierarchical sequence of studies from grammar through humanities and rhetoric to philosophy and theology. (Farrell 1970, xiii–xiv) Prefects of studies coordinated cohorts; rectors and provincials enforced uniform standards; weekly disputations and public "acts" trained students to argue with precision and decorum. The Ratio also specified reading lists, hours, and the roles of tutors, ensuring that a pupil moving from Cologne to Naples or from Vilnius to Lisbon would encounter recognizably the same programme (O'Malley 1993, 8–20; Farrell 1970, xv–xviii).

By the seventeenth century, this administrative machinery sustained a global system of higher education. Colleges and residential academies multiplied across Catholic Europe and far beyond, forming a network that moved teachers, textbooks, and methods with unusual speed. Print reinforced this circulation: compendia, commentaries, and disputation theses produced in one province were adopted and adapted in another, so that a textbook written for a Roman classroom could be taught in Prague, Antwerp, or Puebla (Friedrich 2022, 201–32). The schools were not isolated institutions. They sat at the intersection of pastoral care and civic culture: they trained clergy and laity, furnished preachers and confessors to courts and cities, staged Latin drama for urban audiences, and maintained sodalities that linked adolescent piety with adult patronage.

This mattered for philosophy and science. In philosophy, the Society preserved and reshaped Thomistic-Suárezian scholasticism, consolidating a common syllabus while allowing controlled debate on contested points. Logic, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and moral theology were taught in a sequence that privileged clarity of definition and argumentative order. The leading manuals and commentaries—Thomas Aquinas as the norm, Francesco Suárez as interpreter and foil—supplied the conceptual grammar of causality, substance and accident, act and potency, habitus and virtue (Casalini, Pavur 2016, 239–44). Yet the schools did not function as museums of inherited doctrine. Faculty read new books, staged *quaestiones* on fresh problems, and revised notes as controversies evolved. Where necessary, they integrated novel observations into older frameworks.

The Society's engagement with the new sciences was continuous and ambivalent, at once receptive and cautious. At the Collegio Romano, Christoph Clavius, the long-serving professor of mathematics, was a principal

architect of the Gregorian calendar reform that culminated in 1582 and continued to be explained, defended, and taught into the early seventeenth century (Baldini 1994, 121–27). Clavius expanded the mathematical curriculum, promoted Euclidean rigour, and trained students who would make astronomy and instrumentation central to Jesuit pedagogy. (Baldini 1994, 128) In the mid-seventeenth century, Giovanni Battista Riccioli and Francesco Maria Grimaldi combined observation, experiment, and careful argument in their *Almagestum Novum* and related works. (Heilbron 1999, 53–54) They measured pendulums, mapped the Moon, proposed lunar nomenclature still in use, and explored the behaviour of light and shadow; Grimaldi coined "diffraction" to mark phenomena not captured by simple rectilinear propagation. Their astronomy defended a sophisticated geocentric or Tychonic framework even as it assimilated telescopic data and improved methods of measurement (Heilbron 1999, 55–78).

Athanasius Kircher, a Roman polymath and indefatigable correspondent, exemplified another Jesuit mode of learned activity: the encyclopaedic synthesis of marvels, reports, and instruments into compendia that sought to order the world's knowledge. His museum at the Roman College displayed fossils, automata, scientific devices, and ethnographic curiosities; his printed works ranged from magnetism to hieroglyphs, volcanoes to music. However heterogeneous, this oeuvre reveals the Baroque appetite for totality and the Jesuit instinct to organize novelty within an intelligible frame. The taste for "curious" phenomena that animated Kircher also percolated through classrooms and popular lectures, where demonstrations of optics, pneumatics, and mechanics accompanied formal teaching (Findlen 2004, 33–39).

The seventeenth century was also the age of global missions. Jesuit education provided the linguistic, logical, and rhetorical skills that missionaries applied abroad; reports from Asia and the Americas, in turn, fed European curiosity and reshaped curricula (Friedrich 2022, 221). In China, Matteo Ricci's strategy of accommodation and mathematical expertise opened elite doors at the end of the sixteenth century and set patterns that continued with his successors in the seventeenth. Calendrical science and cartography travelled with catechesis; translations moved both ways. In New Spain, Peru, and Paraguay, reductions organized communal life and schooling; observations of flora, fauna, and languages entered European collections (Friedrich 2022, 244–51). The missions were intellectual enterprises as well as pastoral ones. They tested the elasticity of scholastic categories when confronted with unfamiliar cosmologies and practices, and they supplied data for natural history and geography that teachers at the Roman College or in Antwerp could integrate into lessons (Friedrich 2022, 251–54).

In the confessional conflicts of the period, the Jesuits were visible actors. They preached in contested cities, advised Catholic princes, staffed seminaries that formed clergy for re-Catholicized territories, and debated Protestant theologians in print and at court. Their schools helped consolidate post-Tridentine Catholic culture by shaping elite literacy and argument. Latin drama, emblematic processions, and public disputations linked the classroom to the street, presenting ordered knowledge as civic spectacle (O'Malley 1993, 7–11). The Thirty Years' War and its aftermath affected colleges unevenly, but the order's administrative resilience, provincial congregations, visitations, and regular correspondence with Rome sustained continuity of practice through political instability (Friedrich 2022, 233).

The internal mechanics of Jesuit pedagogy deserve emphasis, because they explain both the endurance of the schools and their intellectual profile. The *praelectio*, a structured explication of a text that combined paraphrase with analysis, taught students to move from words to things and back again. Daily repetition and weekly disputation drilled retrieval and application. The curriculum required cycles of composition: Latin verse and prose in the lower schools; set-piece orations and forensic exercises in rhetoric; theses defended in philosophy and theology. (Farrell 1970, xx–xxii) The method cultivated a habitus of conceptual discrimination and a public style of reason-giving that could be transposed from the pulpit to the laboratory and the law court. Even when Jesuit philosophers resisted elements of the new mechanical philosophy, their students possessed the tools to read Descartes, to reconstruct an argument, and to press objections in the idiom of the schools (Casalini and Pavur 2016, 254).

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the network of colleges anchored by institutions such as Vilnius (raised to an academy in 1579) and Braniewo trained generations for service in church and commonwealth. The Polish-Lithuanian colleges followed the Ratio closely while responding to local needs: instruction in rhetoric supported the Commonwealth's political culture of public speech; philosophical courses prepared clergy and magistrates to reason in a shared scholastic idiom; drama and festival articulated Catholic identity in a multi-confessional society. Within this milieu, Wojciech Adalbert Tylkowski (1624–1695) emerged as a representative figure. His *Philosophia curiosa* reflects both scholastic rigor clear divisions, articulated theses, careful resolution of objections and Baroque curiosity, a readiness to catalogue phenomena and to indulge wonder as a prelude to explanation (Darowski 1994, 15–17). The work's curiosity is not an abandonment of method, but its expansion to include the newly notable,

in the spirit of Kircher's compendia and the experimental demonstrations circulating in Jesuit schools (Findlen 2004, 111–14).

The picture that results is one of institutional coherence amid intellectual diversity. The Society of Jesus, in the seventeenth century, preserved a core curriculum that stabilized philosophical vocabulary and argumentative form, while its teachers and writers engaged new instruments, data, and geographies (O'Malley 1993: 12–23; Friedrich 2022: 244–48). The order's global communications, disciplined pedagogy, and culture of disputation enabled a rapid diffusion of practices, from calendar reform to telescope use and mathematical instruction, across provinces. The same mechanisms that formed preachers and confessors also produced astronomers, linguists, and encyclopaedists. The Jesuit school was thus not a marginal appendage to pastoral life, but a central engine of Catholic intellectual culture, shaping the terms in which philosophy and science could be discussed and the audiences to whom they could be addressed. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as elsewhere, that engine powered the education of writers like Tylkowski, whose pages exhibit the Society's characteristic blend of system and surprise: a disciplined scholasticism open to the widened horizon of the seventeenth-century world.

REFERENCES:

Baldini, Ugo. 1994. "The Jesuit College in Rome and the Calendar Reform." Physis 31 (1): 121–56.

Casalini, Cristiano and Claude Pavur. 2016. *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540–1616.* Chestnut Hill.

Darowski, Roman. 1994. *Filozofia w szkołach jezuickich w Polsce w XVI wieku* [*Philosophy in the Jesuit Colleges in Poland in the 17th Century*]. Krakow: WAM.

Farrell, Allan P. 1970. *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599.* Washington, DC.

Findlen, Paula. 2004. *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything.* New York: Routledge.

Friedrich, Markus 2022. *The Jesuits: A History.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Heilbron, J.L. 1999. *The Sun in the Church.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

O'Malley, John W. 1993. *The First Jesuits.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Adalbertus (Wojciech) Tylkowski SJ (1624–1695) and his *Philosophia curiosa* (1669)[1]

Franciszek Bargieł SJ (translation)

Abstract A monographic study on this subject by Franciszek Bargieł was published in 1986 in Polish as *Wojciech Tylkowski SJ i jego "Philosophia curiosa" z 1669 r.* (Krakow 1986, 197 pp.); we shall present a synthesis of the key elements of this here, for readers of *Forum Philosophicum*.

I. Introduction: Justification of the Dissertation

The man of whom we speak appears worthy of mention even in our time, as an outstanding witness of his age, a writer of very many works on the most diverse topics (theology, philosophy, the physico-mathematical sciences, asceticism, devotion, education, homiletics, and canon law), published in many places not only within the borders of Poland but also in foreign lands (Augsburg, Braunsberg/Braniewo, Frankfurt, Gdańsk-Oliwa, Graz, Heiligenstadt, Kalisz, Krakow, Konstanz, Košice, Lublin, Lviv, Nysa, Przemyśl, Regensburg, Trnava/Tyrnava, Ulm, Warsaw, Vienna, Vilnius, Wrocław, and Würzburg). He was therefore a very studious and most learned man, skilled in many languages, and a polyhistor, composing his texts in Latin and in vernacular Polish, whose name is inscribed permanently in the history of (Polish and European) intellectual culture and ought not to be erased from it.

He was called, by contemporaries and posterity, "a most learned scholastic of the seventeenth century." His learning is attested to by the many names of authorities cited in *Philosophia curiosa*, which number as many as there are pages in the three hundred pages of the Krakow compendium. These belong to various spheres and types of human culture and, indeed, to nations and times ranging from Hebrew, Greek, and Latin antiquity, through the medieval, patristic, and scholastic ages, down to modern times with their own sciences. It cites not only nearly all of the philosophers, but also other figures mentioned in the Bible, mythology, church history, and both Christian and Arab-Muslim literature.

1. The article was originally published in Latin in Forum Philosophicum 7 (2002), 239–51.

His writings were translated into other languages (German), and he received commendations in official letters sent to him by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus. He knew several languages. Besides Polish and Latin, he knew Hebrew, Greek, Italian, Spanish, French, and German.

Here, then, are reasons commending the person and work of Tylkowski as worthy of being remembered and discussed scientifically in these days as well.

II. Objective Bibliography: i.e. Publications on Tylkowski

Much has been written about him and his Philosophia curiosa in encyclopaedias, lexica, and historiographies, and indeed not uniformly. More often he was reviewed positively, though only with moderate criticism. Yet wholly negative opinions have not been lacking—notably that expressed by H. Struve in his book on logic *The History of Logic as a Theory of Cognition in Poland*. (Warsaw 1911, 183–84) However, this view does not have a solid foundation, as more careful studies have shown.

In the hitherto most extensive dissertation on him—which is what is under consideration here—twenty-six bibliographical titles devoted to him are cited; the most important of these are noted below.

1. Gabryl, Franciszek. 1913. "Philosophical Concepts of Our Seventeenth-Century Scholastics." *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 10: 97–114, 217–27.
2. Bednarski, Stanisław. 1933. *The Decline and Revival of Jesuit Schools in Poland*, Krakow: 87, 295–97, 333.
3. Estreicher, Karol Józef Teofil. 1936. *Bibliografia polska*, Vol. 31: 452–73.
4. Plečkaitis, Romanas. 1975. *Philosophy in Lithuania in the Feudal Period*, Vilnius: 185–86, 481.
5. Tazbir, Janusz. 1978. "W. Tylkowski, a Ridiculed Polymath." *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki* 32 (1): 77–78, 83–100.
6. Darowski, Roman. 1978/1980. "Genesis of Wojciech Tylkowski SJ's Philosophia curiosa." *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej*, 26: 22–43.
7. Ogonowski, Zbigniew. 1979. *Philosophy and Social Thought of the Seventeenth Century*, Part 2: 296–303.
8. Ogonowski, Zbigniew. 1985. *School Philosophy in Seventeenth--Century Poland*, Warsaw: 101–07.

III. Curriculum Vitae

He lived nearly seventy years, between about 1624 and 1695, fifty of which he spent in the Society of Jesus, in its Lithuanian province. He was born in Mazovia between the years 1622 and 1629. Various dates of birth are noted in documents. He entered the Society at Vilnius on 1st February 1645. After the novitiate he completed studies in the humanities and the liberal arts. He studied a three-year course of philosophy (1648–1651) in two colleges (Orsha and Polotsk). After completing this, for four years (1651–1655) he taught rhetoric and mathematics in middle schools, carrying out the usual teaching practicum in the Society (Polotsk, Nieśwież). In his theological studies he suffered serious impediments due to war with the Cossacks and the Swedes that was raging then. He began these at Poznań in 1655, and continued in Prague in Bohemia until 1659, where he was also ordained a priest, and was engaged for two years in the care of souls in Wrocław in Silesia, which belonged to the Bohemian province of the Society.

Having returned to his homeland, he chiefly devoted himself to teaching various disciplines (moral theology, Hebrew, philosophy, mathematics) in various places and for various periods. During the years 1662–1666 he taught these sciences at Braunsberg. From 1666 to 1670, in Warsaw, he was a professor of moral theology, philosophy, and mathematics. From 1670 to 1673 he stayed in the Vatican in Rome as a confessor in the basilica of St. Peter. From 1673 to 1675 he was Rector of the Pontifical Seminary and a professor of mathematics. From 1677 to 1683 he fulfilled the office of court missionary (theologian, confessor, preacher, chaplain) with two bishops, first of Płock and then of Poznań. Having left the episcopal court, he returned to teaching moral theology and mathematics, first at Płock (1683–1685), then in Warsaw (1685–1692). He died on 14th January 1695, in either Warsaw or Vilnius, both of these versions having been recorded.

IV. Subjective Bibliography: Chiefly, Philosophical Writings and Lines of Development

Tylkowski combined teaching duties and other priestly offices with constantly writing and publishing texts—on, indeed, very many areas of human knowledge and activity, as was noted above. The writings handed down to posterity number 60 items in all. They were published and republished not only in Poland but also beyond its borders—namely, in Germany—and were even translated into that language from the Latin in which they were usually composed.

Many of his publications do not belong to the genus of philosophy or of science, but serve the needs of religious life and Christian piety. His

philosophical writing, however, gradually evolved: from collections of theses for students' disputations published at Braunsberg in 1664–1666, through the compendium *Philosophia curiosa* made public in Krakow in 1669, to a multi-volume edition of *Philosophia curiosa*, in which the *Physica curiosa* alone contains 10 tomes, to which not only *Logica* and *Metaphysica curiosae* are to be added, but also *Matheseos curiosae pars I et II* and, moreover, "Pars quarta Philosophiae curiosae continens compendium Philosophiae moralis (de bono et malo) et de re agrarian"—in sum, 15 volumes printed partly at Oliva near Gdańsk and partly at Poznań in the years 1680–1694.

Two books composed in Polish also belong to this third stage of Tylkowski's philosophical activity there: *Uczone rozmowy* [*Learned Conversations*] from 1692, and *Stół mądrości ku zbawiennemu i politycznemu przy stołowych rozmowach pożytkowi* [*The Table of Wisdom for Saving and Civic Benefit at Table-Talk*] from 1674.

The first stage of *Philosophia curiosa* consists of six collections of theses, published at Braunsberg for scholastic use when he was their teacher in philosophy there (1664–1666). This was ascertained and established by Roman Darowski SJ. They are as follows:

1. *Select Conclusions from the Whole of Aristotle's Logic*;
2. *Select Conclusions from Aristotle's Books On Physics*;
3. *Select Conclusions from Aristotle's Books On Coming-to-Be and Passing-Away and the Elements*;
4. *Select Conclusions from Aristotle's Books On the World, the Heavens, and Meteorology*;
5. *Select Philosophical Conclusions from Aristotle's Books On the Soul*;
6. *Select Philosophical Conclusions from Aristotle's Metaphysics.*

The full title of the book under discussion is as follows: *Philosophia curiosa seu quaestiones et conclusiones curiosae de universa Aristotelis philosophia ad genium et ingenium huius saeculi formatae et propositae per A. Tylkowski e Soc. Jesu, theologum et philosophiae professorem in Varsaviensi Collegio eiusdem Societatis.* (Warsaw 1669)[*Curious Philosophy, or Curious Questions and Conclusions on the Whole of Aristotle's Philosophy, Shaped and Proposed to the Spirit and Wit of this Century by A. Tylkowski of the Society of Jesus, Theologian and Professor of Philosophy at the Warsaw College of the Same Society.*]

V. The Doctrine Contained in the Compendium of *Philosophia Curiosa* From 1669, Viewed in General Terms as a Middle Stage of His Development

That text is divided into five parts, namely: logic, physics in two parts (general and particular), psychology, and metaphysics, all designated by the adjective "curiosa." The doctrine is set forth in a similar way in the individual parts: that is, through theses (assertions) and questions (interrogations) which, however, are not coextensive with the theses and their content, but display a certain portion of them in a somewhat unusual form that spontaneously arouses the reader's attention and curiosity.

The several parts are not of the same extent, and they also differ in the number of theses and questions: Logic numbers 40 pages with 30 theses--questions; Physics I, 81 pages with 36 problems; Physics II, 60 pages and 24 problems; Psychology, 76 pages and 53 problems; Metaphysics, 38 pages and 20 problems. From this overview it seems to be clear that the greatest space is given to Physics and Psychology, the least to Metaphysics, and not much more to Logic.

The doctrine of *Philosophia curiosa* does not depart much from the traditional scholasticism of that time as contained, for example, in two contemporary works by A.Q. Krasnodębski SJ and T. Młodzianowski SJ, entitled *Philosophia Aristotelis explicata and Praelectiones philosophicae*. At least, this is so in the philosophical compendium of Tylkowski from 1669—i.e. in the middle stage of the development of *Philosophia curiosa*. Whatever difference there is between Tylkowski's philosophy and that of his two confreres is mainly formal in nature, consisting in a specific form and method—that is, in the "curiosity" of philosophizing announced already in the book's very title: hence, a popular mode of writing without scientific apparatus, a symbolic way of speaking full of images, examples, and comparisons, which appeals to experience and common sense and aims to be useful and fruitful in everyday life. For this reason *Philosophia curiosa* cannot be a manual text for students like the works compared with it (Krasnodębski and Młodzianowski), which employ a scientific language with syllogistic argumentation.

VI. *Logica Curiosa* (30 Questions, Over 40 Pages)

Its general subject is made up of the three operations of the mind, from which arise concepts/ideas, judgments, and reasonings/discourses. It therefore does not differ in essentials from the logical tradition of scholastic philosophy. The individual operations are explained as to their laws, with introductory questions on the nature of science and logic and on their

relation to other sources of knowledge—and, in the manner commonly embraced at that time, some metaphysical topics are also added.

Cognitive certitude, even scientific certitude, does not in Tylkowski's view always require demonstration, for it can be immediately evident in and of itself. Ahead of his account of the development of science, he calls Aristotle's philosophy a preliminary science. Analogously to his contemporary T. Młodzianowski SJ, he conceives of logic as a kind of art which is more practical than theoretical: that is, a practical-speculative science, whose object is not the cognition of truth but the rectitude of cognition and its acts. It is not a real science, criteriology, but a formal one: dialectic. Its function is to direct the operations of the mind and the sciences so that they are correct. Therefore, knowledge of logic is useful to everyone; it facilitates and prolongs life. All the laws, principles, and axioms of logic, like the norms of ethics, have universal validity for every time and place without exception.

Speaking of the object of science and logic, Tylkowski distinguishes a threefold species: the material object, the formal object, and the object of attribution as constitutive of the principal formal object, and therefore of the greatest importance in the process of cognition. This last species of object is specific to him. In the development of cognition he assigns great roles to abstraction and distinction: the former serves the formation of universal concepts, the latter serves the clarity of cognition through knowledge of the parts of the object.

In the chapter on the first operation of the mind he underlines the importance of universal ideas in their twofold kind, firstly, insofar as there are direct and reflex universals, secondly: the *praedicamenta*, the categories of being (substance and nine accidents), and the *praedicabilia*, the modes of predicating (genus, species, specific difference, property, logical accident)—that is, metaphysical and logical universals, general modes of being and of predication. A metaphysical insertion of this sort was usual in logic texts of that time, and to it are added other metaphysical topics: namely, on the notion of being and, above all, on the category of relation.

Tylkowski does not acknowledge the analogy of the concept of being, but holds it to be the highest genus predicable univocally of God and creatures, of substance and accidents. He explicates the question of relation in the mind of Francisco Suárez, and of ontological modalism. Relations he places between complete entities, not between their internal constituents. They are not really distinct from their subjects and foundations. They can be transcendental, essential, holding between causes and their effects and predicamental relations, accidental, depending on their term—as, for

example, likeness. Some are unilateral (between the world and God its Creator), others mutual, bilateral (between creatures).

The question of words—that is, of terms in speech and writing—is raised within the problem of truth in cognition. Cognitive truth resides primarily in judgment and enunciation, and only secondarily is predicated of objects. Statements about future contingents, both absolute and conditional (counterfactuals), also have their own truth.

Reasoning is defined as "an enunciation inferring one proposition from another." Its perfect form is the syllogism, consisting of two premises and one conclusion, introducing various figures and modes. For its validity and rectitude a consequence is necessary: that is, the outflow of the conclusion or consequent from the premises or antecedent. The author warns against sophisms—that is, fallacious modes of reasoning. He compares science with faith, considering them to be diverse sources of cognition that are not repugnant to each other and can cooperate peacefully. Faith in God and knowledge about God are both possible.

The "curiosities" usually objected to in Tylkowski are hardly present in his logic: at least, not real ones. In a few simulated and purely verbal instances, real problems worthy of investigation are concealed.

VII. *Physica Curiosa*. Part I: General

Its subject is "Selected Conclusions from Aristotle's Books *On Physics*," presented in 36 questions and over 81 pages. Generally speaking, the matter here is the natural body and its structure, conceived modally in the mind of Suárez; the relative categories of being, likewise conceived modally; the dynamism of the body—i.e. its fourfold causality (material, formal, efficient, final), with divine causality not excepted; the substantial and accidental changeability of bodies; the so-called elements or simple constituents of bodies and their various combinations in living and non-living things; and, finally, local motion (spontaneous and mechanical), its causes, and its connections with place and time.

Doctrinally, *Physica curiosa* does not differ much from the Aristotelian-scholastic physics set forth in other writings. Its specific features are: ontological modalism—i.e. the introduction of modes into the constitution of bodies among their constitutive elements (matter and form, essence and existence, substance and accidents), meaning the Suárezian conception of scholasticism; and, further, the treatment, in the chapter on corporeal causality, of divine activity with respect to the world created by God, in terms of its continual conservation in being and cooperation with its actions.

In particular, for Tylkowski, only Aristotelian hylomorphism (the union of matter and form) seemed appropriate to explain the structure of bodies. The conceptions of ancient philosophers, and of the defenders of atomism, did not appeal to him. In his conception, matter is pure potency, which does not exist in reality except in union with form, even if it is not without its own existence. The form is prior, and is lost in change so that another may be received. Some bodies are natural, one per se; others are artefacts, joined accidentally as aggregations of bodies. In the area of causality, action at a distance is rejected as contradictory in and of itself—as is the physical dynamism of numbers (*contra* Pythagoras) and words (*contra* Paracelsus), and reciprocal causality.

Tylkowski strongly attacks magic, and the various superstitions then rampant. He acknowledges a distinction between terrestrial and celestial powers and activities (of the heavenly bodies). He emphasizes the finality of the actions of brute animals as moderated by their instinct. He holds possible the compenetration of bodies (two bodies in one place) and multilocation (one body in several places), but only by the power of God—and, also, a vacuum in space, though not an infinite material magnitude. Concerning divine concurrence with the actions of creatures he insists that, in relation to human beings, it should not be by way of physical predetermination, since this would be incompatible with freedom.

Continuous quantity, in his opinion, is not composed of indivisible elements, but of extended parts which are further divisible to infinity. There is no contradiction in the eternity of the world (creation from eternity), although many things argue against it. Local motion, as a flowing reality passing through different places, cannot be instantaneous, complete in a single moment and a single place: such are substantial changes and the actions of God (creation). From local motion there results an impetus, an impulse, as a quality enabling further movement. However, a "perpetual motion" machine is neither real nor possible.

VIII. *Physica Curiosa*. Part II: Particular

This part, with 24 questions and over 60 pages, comments on Aristotle's text *On Coming-to-Be and Passing-Away and the Elements*. The questions considered in this second part of the treatment of physics are not altogether other or different from those raised in that of general physics, but very close and similar, repeating what has already been said so that it may be explained more accurately. Such a manner of writing is to be observed in other texts by Tylkowski as well.

In respect of the general arrangement of the problems, we may point to the following: the mutability of bodies (substantial and accidental),

their activity, properties, constitutive elements, and the motion and rest of bodies.

In particular:

1) Substantial change assumes three species—namely, generation, corruption (birth and death), and the transformation of one thing into another—in which there shines through an alchemical persuasion about the possibility of acquiring gold in the process of transformations. In the case of corruption and putrefaction, autogenesis or spontaneous generation is admitted given the autonomous generation of worms, from which plagues were believed to arise at that time, also in philosophy.

2) Accidental change is effected in the category of quantity and quality, insofar as quantity increases or diminishes, becomes greater or lesser (augmentation, growth; and detriment, diminution), while quality (heat, color, light) changes in its intensity, assuming various degrees. Qualitative change can be perfective or corruptive, intensifying or weakening a quality.

3) The activity of a body can proceed in three ways: either with respect to similarity, or according to contrariety, or via the reaction of resistance.

4) Among the properties of a body one can point to rarity and density (rarefaction and condensation), and also heaviness and lightness. Along with heaviness, the phenomenon of gravitation is also explained, which assumes various forms in air and water.

5) More attention is paid to the so-called elements or internal principles of bodies by which they are constituted. These are conceived as simple corpuscles, not dissoluble into other smaller ones. In Aristotle's mind, there are four elements composing material things, and they are ordered hierarchically according to the degree of heaviness: fire, air, water, earth—but also distinguished by their own properties (hot, humid, cold, dry). Each element has its own elemental sphere or surrounding space. Earth is distinguished as a constitutive element and as the terrestrial globe. In this latter sense it is said to be mobile, but without any explanation being given as to how this happens. Another version of bodily constitution devised by the chemists is also given, which is effected by salt, sulfur, and mercury as so-called principles of movements. Moreover, the mixtures of elements are diversified in living and non-living things, as well as on the Earth's surface and under the Earth, where metals and other minerals arise (gold, silver, copper, lead). In this chapter, human temperaments are also mentioned: that is, the various natural types of human disposition (choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic).

6) Finally, bodies are considered in a state of motion or of rest. One kind of motion is natural and spontaneous, another artificial and mechanical,

evoked by external force. In its production, various machines or devices produced thanks to human technical skill take part, in order to augment bodily powers and activities.

The particular physics therefore completes the general one, but also often repeats its questions. It is less philosophical than the other. It frequently appeals to experience, from which it draws its arguments, as well as to common sense. It also uses biblical-theological arguments, especially in its digressions about imaginary spaces and about the motions of the heavens.

Among the real "curiosities" noted above is the live birth of worms (spontaneous generation) from putrefaction.

IX. *Psychologia Curiosa* (Anthropology): Treated in 53 Questions and Over 76 Pages

As far as its extent is concerned, this comes second after the treatment of physics; it is more extensive than those of logic and metaphysics. In the traditional division of scholastic philosophy, it is not encountered as a separate segment. Its doctrine partly belongs to physics, partly to metaphysics.

It deals both with the soul in general and with the specifically human rational soul. The soul, understood generically, is the principle of life and immanent motion in all living things (plants, brute animals, human beings), assuming in them various species of soul: vegetative, sensitive, and rational. Further, there is discussion of its powers/faculties and of its vegetative and sensitive functions (of the external and internal senses), and indeed of very many questions which now pertain to other non-philosophical sciences such as biology, anatomy, physiology, medicine, and others.

The vegetative soul presides over three functions: nourishment, growth, and generation—that is, the origin of a living being from a living being in the likeness of the species. The sensitive soul operates through the five external senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) and the four internal senses (common sense, imagination, the estimative power/instinct, and memory). There is one soul in the body. It operates through itself, even if it has faculties. In a human being it is indivisible; in other living things it is divisible. It does not vivify all the elements of the body. Lacking life are blood, milk, fat/grease, bones, and teeth. Blood is in the body, but is not mixed with it. From blood arise the so-called "vital or animal spirits," which take part in animals' operations and sometimes cause abnormal affections.

The rational soul is unitary in a human being, whole in the entirety of the body and in every part of it. Virtually it contains within itself the lower souls, vegetative and sensitive. It is spiritual (immaterial) and immortal. It has three faculties: memory, intellect, and will—although memory does

not really differ from intellect. The human will enjoys freedom (of exercise and of specification), to which natural actions are not subject, since they are performed of necessity. The fruits of exercised freedom (of free actions) are good or bad habits, operative dispositions, virtues or vices, which incite to further works and make them easier.

Tylkowski's psychology does not essentially differ from scholastic psychology, at least in the rational part, but it is enriched with arguments drawn from experience.

X. *Metaphysica Curiosa* (Ontology and Natural Theology)

This expounds the third part of scholastic philosophy, and in comparison to the other parts of *Philosophia curiosa* is the briefest, consisting of twenty questions discussed over 38 pages. In its subject matter it is nevertheless rather complex and diversified, in that it is partly ontological, partly angelological, and partly theological; of these, the last contains four questions, the first five, and the middle one eleven.

In its ontological part, the discussion is about being as such, together with its properties—the one, the true, and the good; about the essence and existence of being, which are not really distinct; about subsistence, supposit, or person; about their incommunicability *ad extra*; and about the being of reason existing only in the mind—that is, in cognition.

The most extensive part of Metaphysica curiosa is about the so-called "intelligences"—that is, incorporeal spirits, good and evil angels, their existence, nature, faculties, activity, and their influence on human beings and on material events. Their existence is argued for, especially, from the heavens with their orderly and regular motions, which must be directed by intelligent beings. For the fulfillment of this office, the intelligences were devised by Aristotle and received by scholasticism. Other arguments likewise persuade one of their reality.

In Tylkowski's opinion, the angels were created by God before the creation of the world. They are endowed with intellect, will, and power to act, but of limited strength. As men have their guardian angels, so do the stars; each of them has a guardian and mover who takes care of its orbital motions. They can also influence human beings and their actions, whom they outnumber. They are diversified into species. In their decisions, good or evil, they are mutable, in which regard there seems to lie a hopeful conjecture about the possibility of the reconciliation of demons with God—that is, their possible conversion to God through the revocation of their former rebellion. As they can change their will, so they can change their dwelling by migrating from place to place. They cannot be simultaneously in many

places, but several can be in one place. One devil cannot at the same time occupy and possess several human beings.

Moreover, angels, both good and evil, can move bodies, stir up earthquakes, storms, and tempests, and also engender rain in a finite region, though not over the whole world. Likewise, they can induce diseases and weaknesses, produce deceptions in the senses, and change a person's outward appearance into that of a brute animal. They do not know free operations with certainty, but only probably. They cannot compel human beings, but only give inspirations, good or bad.

The theological metaphysics presents not only natural theology, but also certain elements of dogmatic theology founded on divine revelation. It treats first of the existence, nature, and attributes of God, insofar as these are knowable by the light of reason alone; then of the God of faith insofar as He is the Trinity of Persons, which even the pagan philosophers Plato and Aristotle acknowledged, or at least had a presentiment of. Arguments persuading one of the existence of God do not stand in the way of the possibility and fact of atheism. Our knowledge of God is better grounded than that of the existence of angels. The divine nature, however, is almost inaccessible to human cognition; it is therefore safer to speak of God negatively than positively, to say what He is not rather than what He is—i.e. to use expressions involving negations: immutable, immense, infinite, immortal, incomprehensible…

God most certainly is not a material being, but spiritual, most simple, most perfect, omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal, living and free, beneficent, the source of all things outside Himself, without temporal succession. He simply is. The infinity of God contains in itself all God's properties, which can be reduced to it, the Trinity of Persons not excepted. Tylkowski confirms his assertions by geometric conclusions drawn from the infinity of a line.

XI. Curiosities, Absurdities, Witticisms, Cases of Insolence, "Instances of the Ridiculous," Singularities, and Marvels Found in *Philosophia Curiosa*

Some of these are purely verbal, others to some extent real, but they are common to other philosophers of that time and are due to the state of development of the sciences. Such was their conviction regarding animal or vital spirits present in the blood and wandering through the body, arising from a piece of flesh as instruments of various vital phenomena. Likewise, their view about the diversity of matter and forces in terrestrial and celestial bodies, and about the moving of the heavens by the so-called intelligences

or angels as guardians and movers. There was also their alchemical conviction about the transmutation of metals, their generation deep in the Earth through formative power, and their growth from particles sown in the Earth. Likewise, their stance regarding the autogenesis, the spontaneous birth, of worms from putrefaction.

Certain "instances of the ridiculous" seem proper to him: the rejuvenation of an old man; the reception of new teeth in old age; cooling through heat and fire; the possibility of being satisfied by smell alone; the killing of sheep and their beneficial consumption for him (by the light of faith); the justification of burning witches, insofar as they are instruments of demons.

In proportion to the entirety of the text and the problems discussed, these are not many; they do not exceed a tenth of it. Attention should also be paid above all to their purpose, which is not the creation of witticisms as such, or purely humorous, but methodological: the arousing of readers' curiosity and the stimulation of the human mind for reading and study of the book *Philosophia curiosa*. In view of this, Tylkowski's work, by reason of its curiosities, cannot be declared altogether inept, nor can its scientific value be called into question. Notwithstanding all those things which, in the light of today's state of development of the sciences, can rightly be objected to about it, even if it certainly does not everywhere measure up to the scientific norms and methodological demands of the present time it should, for its own time, be deemed genuinely useful for those of a modest intellectual culture, apt for informing minds on many questions not otherwise known about, and effective in fostering a moderate form of intellectual criticism vis a vis more than a few superstitions then rampant, as well as various scientific prejudices unworthy of a Christian person and a sober mind—indeed, ones quite harmful both in private life and in social intercourse. Even today, reading this book does not seem like time spent idly and uselessly for a person skilled in Latin, to whom philosophical problems are not alien.

Recapitulation of the Dissertation

The curiosities present in our author's philosophy do not prevent it from being acknowledged as a typical instance of scholastic philosophy in its Thomistic-Suárezian version as taught in the schools of the Society of Jesus in Poland in the seventeenth century. Here are its principal distinctive characteristics: first, its close connection with the texts of Aristotle, with many references to them, even if it cannot be called a commentary on them; then, the not very precise separation between philosophical and

theological topics, with the result that in explaining or proving purely natural problems, arguments or examples taken from divine revelation are used more than just occasionally; finally, a popular and symbolic mode of narrating and expounding the problem under consideration, often appealing to imagination, common sense, and human customs—hence, a kind of empiricism joined with a priori argumentation which, however, never assumes a syllogistic form; and lastly, a very frequent resorting to authorities of all times and nations, where these are not only strictly philosophical but drawn from all areas and types of human culture and activity—something that foreshadows the eclectic mode of philosophizing which prevailed in later generations of philosophers. Most often, Tylkowski appeals to three authors along with their works: Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Augustine, the bishop of Tagaste. He does not openly refer to Suárez, although he professes his ontological modalism. His Latin terminology is very abundant; doctrinal statements are not infrequently repeated, which may be considered a defect, even though in the author's own mind this was meant to aid the reader's memory.

In brief: the philosophy contained in the book *Philosophia curiosa* is scholastic as to doctrine, but not in the manner of its exposition—given that syllogistic argumentation is lacking. Moreover, it does not have the customary form encountered in the disciplines of philosophy; accordingly, it should rather be called an omni-science, an encyclopedia of all the sciences.

Considering all of the above, the attention paid to Tylkowski and his philosophy, whether in the book made publicly available in 1986 or in this synthesis of its key elements, appears entirely justified; indeed, it is to be hoped that the author himself, and his work, will henceforth be shown in a clearer light and held in better estimation.

The Wartime Roots of Wittgenstein's Logic: Review of Urszula Idziak-Smoczyńska's Book

Urszula Idziak-Smoczyńska, Wittgenstein in Polish Galicia. *The Life and Thought behind the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2026, 297 pp.

Józef Bremer

Before we begin discussing the form and content of the book *Wittgenstein in Polish Galicia*, two comments should be made regarding its title. Firstly, the author points out that "It is seldom noted that Wittgenstein was in Poland, and this omission is not without reason as Poland was, at that time, partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that from August 1914 until the end of 1917 he was stationed . . . on land historically belonging to Poland" (p. 47). There were only brief interruptions to this state of affairs, such as his officer training in Olomouc. It is likely that Wittgenstein knew that the territories where he fought were historically Polish. Even when these regions were under enemy occupation, he was still operating in Poland. He was involved in the defense, capture, and loss of Polish towns such as Sandomierz, Tarnobrzeg, Szczucin, Sokal, Lwów, Kraków and others.

Secondly, the subtitle of the book, *The Life and Thought behind the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, informs us that the author will be referring to the genesis and the content of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, pointing to specific situations from Wittgenstein's wartime stay in Polish Galicia. This can be seen, for example, on page 187, where she suggests that the experiences during, for example, the weeks of the Russian Brusilov Offensive, prompted Wittgenstein to engage in intense self-reflection, lasting from July 4th, 1916, to October-November of the same year. *Unencrypted Notebooks* entries from this period partially overlap with *Tractatus* items

✍ Józef Bremer, Ignatianum University in Krakow, Poland ✉ jozef.bremer@ignatianum.edu.pl 🆔 0000-0001-9664-8896

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 133–38 Subm. 20 February 2026 Acc. 23 February 2026
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043 DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.09

from 6.41, and "their significance is heightened by the fact that they were written at the epicenter of the war experience" (p. 186). The next day (5th July, 1916), Wittgenstein wrote down in his *Private Notebooks* an entry that would later be transferred to the *Tractatus* as proposition 6.373: "The world is independent of my will." Similar transferals of content from the *Notebooks* take place, for example, in *Tractatus* 6.374, 6.43, and 6.431. According to Idziak-Smoczyńska, "These reflections have garnered significant scholarly attention, yet what is often overlooked is the wartime context that served as a crucial catalyst for their emergence. Understanding the setting in which these ideas took shape is essential for their proper interpretation" (p. 188). The author identifies many more such direct references to the *Notebooks* showing up as material transferred to the *Tractatus* (see e.g. pp. 218, 219), and in her Afterword she writes that "the book narrows its focus to a remarkably brief period in Wittgenstein's life, a fleeting moment when viewed against the expense of a lifetime, corresponding only to a limited number of philosophical issues related to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In consultation with the reviewers and the publisher, the decision was made to refrain from engaging with the complex logical-philosophical debates surrounding the *Tractatus*" (p. 233).

The content of the book *Wittgenstein in Polish Galicia* is skillfully, even intricately, woven around Wittgenstein's personal notes, mainly from the years 1914-1917. Chapter 1 is entitled "The Movement of Thought. The Parable. The Apostle – Wittgenstein's Underestimated Idioms," while Chapter 2 has the title "MS 101: The First War Notebook 9.08.1914 to 30.10.1914." Chapter 3 deals with "MS 102: The Second War Notebook 30.10.1914 to 22.6.1915," and Chapter 4 addresses "MS 103: The Third War Notebook 28.3.16 to 10.1.1917." Finally, there is an Epilogue. Given its subject matter, Idziak-Smoczyńska's choice of such a structure for her book turns out to be highly appropriate for several reasons.

The diary-like notes from the First World War, covering the years 1914 to 1917, are part of Wittgenstein's philosophical manuscripts (MS 101, 102 and 103); the diaries from the 1930s, 1930–32 and 1936/37, on the other hand, are a separate manuscript (MS 183), which was found in the 1990s in the estate of his friend Rudolf Koder. What significance did the diaries have for Wittgenstein personally, and for the development of his early philosophy? As the diaries are part of his philosophical manuscripts, they have a special historical value in that they are—at least at first glance—not bound by public opinion. However, Idziak-Smoczyńska is primarily concerned here not with the documentary value of Wittgenstein's diaries—i.e. the diary as a way of keeping an account of what happened—but rather its

significance as an everyday practice and the result of a specific situation. Seen in this light, Wittgenstein's writing does not always spring from a particular awareness of individuality, but is often evoked by crises and circumstances. Writing down one's view of oneself is also a question of upbringing, an educated middle-class tradition that encourages an internalized form of self-reflection. (See, for example, the diaries of David Hume, Pinsent, Paul Engelmann and Rudolf Koder.)

According to the method adopted by Idziak-Smoczyńska, Wittgenstein's diaries, as part of his manuscripts, can be regarded as biographically motivated reflections on philosophy, but they are also characterized by self-analysis and thoughts on God and faith, sin and meaning (see, e.g., p. 189). For Wittgenstein, writing a diary was a way of understanding himself and coming to terms with himself. The author emphasizes the importance of Wittgenstein's experiences during World War I, which are reflected in the content and form of his diaries. As was mentioned above, she draws parallels between Wittgenstein's wartime posting, his diary entries from the First World War, and statements in the *Tractatus*, which was largely written during the war. Reading Wittgenstein's notes, we see that he conceals, trivializes, romanticizes or in other ways rephrases his actual war experiences and military achievements—a kind of 'inner censorship' that is characteristic of letters sent back from wartime postings and that tends to promote, in its own way, the erasure of the memory of war. "Wittgenstein," so Idziak-Smoczyńska writes, "followed the path of Alyosha [see Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, J.B.]. Such figures, even in war, never seek military achievements; they seek only to approach death. They keep observing because the simplest barrack's stove can be seen as the whole world, like Kartashov's smile for Alyosha" (p. 232).

In contrast to his external perception as a brave soldier, testified to by several medals and his emphatically casual remarks about the war, Wittgenstein's existential crises are only revealed in his secret diaries: expressions filled with a dark longing for death and fear of death, lamentations about religious and moral inadequacy, invocations of God—all of which emerge while serving as an artillery observer at the front. There is silence about his direct experiences of war (see, e.g., p. 36). It is precisely this psychosocial condition that is omnipresent in his diaries, as well as an inner image of the enemy: the immoral, the unbelieving and the vicious—that "other self," or the thought that "I am living in sin" (p. 190; see also p. 212).

There is one more thing worth noting in connection with the structure of the book in question, and thus also in regard to Wittgenstein's *Private Notebooks*. They were first edited in full by Wilhelm Baum and published

in 1991 as *Geheime Tagebücher* (*Secret Diaries*). Baum considered this source significant in two respects: firstly, as with Idziak-Smoczyńska, for learning more about the genesis of the *Tractatus*, and secondly, as helping to clarify the speculation about Wittgenstein's sexuality initiated by William Bartley's 1973 biography of the philosopher.

On the one hand, thanks to the complete edition of the *Geheime Tagebücher* it was indeed possible to question the canonized interpretation of the *Tractatus* as a key work of logical positivism, in the sense of being connected to the philosophy of the Vienna Circle and also as the work of an anti-metaphysician. (Idziak-Smoczyńska mentions this subject briefly on page 203.) For the secret writings show Wittgenstein to be a religious thinker inclined towards moral rigor, influenced by Sören Kierkegaard, Leo Tolstoy and Thomas Emerson, whose influence Idziak-Smoczyńska comments on extensively. On the other hand, whereas the *Tractatus* contains nothing like a "redeeming word," the latter does emerge in the *Private Notebooks* (20th January, 1915; 3rd June, 1915). Baum thus claims—as he himself writes—to have co-initiated a paradigm shift in the interpretation of Wittgenstein's thought. It should be added that Wittgenstein had just finished his technical studies when he volunteered for the army. If his philosophy at that time conveys elements of the kind of thinking more at home in the world of engineering and machines— featuring rules of connection, cognitive precision, commitment to linguistic material—it is, nevertheless, when viewed in its entirety, now found to amount to the purest negative theology: keeping silent about that which is most important, which cannot be said.

Meanwhile, the secret writings, according to Baum, also contribute significantly to understanding Wittgenstein as a religious thinker and to clarifying the controversial issue of his homosexuality. Baum is less concerned with the fact of homosexuality itself than with the significance of this circumstance for Wittgenstein himself. The relevant question is not whether he was homosexual or not, but what significance this possible fact may have had for him. For Baum, it is only in connection with Wittgenstein's desire for "purity" and "decency"—as being necessary to shed light on his sexuality—in that here, homosexuality may explain his outbursts of self-contempt and his suicidal thoughts. This is because Wittgenstein—like Weininger, whom he admired—was radically oriented towards moral greatness and a misguided ethical ideal (see Baum, Nachwort, in: *Geheime Tagebücher*, 1991, pp. 155-72, 164).

In her extensive analyses of the years 1914–1917, as seen from Wittgenstein's perspective, Idziak-Smoczyńska often refers to his epistolary correspondence: for example, with Hermine Wittgenstein (pp. 79–80), Ludwig

von Ficker (pp. 129–39) and Bertrand Russell (pp. 166–67). The contents of his letters plays a central role in researching his thought, because they make a concrete contribution to understanding his work on philosophy and his person: they help to elucidate the genesis of the *Tractatus* and comprehend his writing technique, thereby indirectly improving our understanding of his philosophy. Due to their explicitly explanatory nature, they are an exemplary representation of his way of thinking and writing in a kind of dialogical art—and despite great disharmony, they show his strong involvement in family life and close contacts with friends.

A significant degree of additional value, where Idziak-Smoczyńska's publication is concerned—especially in the context of Polish history—lies in her descriptions of some of the military operations involving the Goplana warship with Ludwig Wittgenstein aboard. In describing the battle at the mouth of the Dunajec River as it passes into the Vistula, she combines these with descriptions of war operations in which Poles were engaged at the same time in the same area: the 1st Infantry Regiment of the Polish Legions, under the command of Józef Piłsudski, later Marshal of an independent Poland, as a part of the Austro-Hungarian Army (pp. 63–72): "The narrative of Piłsudski's and Wittgenstein's simultaneous presence along the same stretch of the Vistula River underscores its crucial role as the primary transportation artery of the Eastern Front" (pp. 65–66). Idziak-Smoczyńska also devotes considerable space to the meeting in Krakow between Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Polish logician and translator Michał Dziewicki. This came about thanks to the mediation of Bertrand Russell. She describes not only the engagement of Michał Dziewicki, but also the social activities of his wife, Adela Dziewicka, thus showing the broader context of life in Galicia and Krakow at that time.

The book reviewed here offers a compelling, richly documented account of Ludwig Wittgenstein's wartime experiences and their decisive impact on the crystallization of the *Tractatus*. Drawing on the philosopher's recently published private war diaries from 1914–1917, Idziak-Smoczyńska reveals previously unknown details from one of the most pivotal moments in twentieth-century philosophy. As an author, she guides the reader through a dramatic period in which Ludwig Wittgenstein—coming from a wealthy Viennese family, a freshly trained engineer, volunteer soldier, and thinker—completed his first important work and underwent a profound spiritual transformation that would permanently shape his intellectual path. Tracing inspirations drawn from the Bible, from the writings of Leo Tolstoy, Fiodor Dostoyevsky, St. Augustine, Ralph Emerson, and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as Wittgenstein's relationships with leading figures of Austrian

modernism such as Georg Trakl, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ludwig von Ficker and Adolf Loos, the book paints a powerful portrait of a thinker poised at the threshold of logic, ethics and extreme human experience.

Fighting on the Eastern Front—beginning with participation in the Austro-Hungarian Viktor Dankl Offensive, through the brutal battles of the Russian Brusilov Offensive, and to the next Russian Kerensky Offensive—Wittgenstein experienced war in its most immediate and violent form. In this extreme proximity to the battlefield, an intense dialogue emerged between his lived experience and the texts of the writers mentioned above. As he wrote in the *Private Notebooks*, he had great difficulty communicating with other, often primitive, vulgar soldiers. This compelling analysis of his formative years is essential reading for anyone interested in the sources of his philosophy. Idziak-Smoczyńska's book situates Wittgenstein within a broader, fascinating context—as one of the outstanding intellectuals and artists of the First World War, whose frontline experiences profoundly shaped the postwar landscape of scientific thought and European culture.

The high quality of the book, in academic or scholarly terms, is evidenced by its huge bibliography and forty pages of extensive footnotes (pp. 235–75). Taken in its entirety, Idziak-Smoczyńska's work is, in a sense, a confirmation of Wittgenstein's own words when he wrote that "meine Arbeit hat sich ausgedehnt von den Grundlagen der Logik zum Wesen der Welt" (*Geheime Tagebücher*, 2.08.1916): it expands from Wittgenstein's personal life and philosophical work on the front line to a broad and multidimensional set of social, political, military and national horizons pertaining to Galicia at the time of the First World War.

Between Wittgenstein and Freud: How Far Can Language-Games Go?

Review of Józef Bremer's book Wittgenstein on Freud Reexamined: Psychoanalytic Treatments as Language-Games. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2025, pp. 255

Jan Hertrich-Woleński

If A and B are giants of thought (be it philosophical or other), it is very tempting to compare ideas proposed by both of them (even in cases where they do not have very much in common). Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein are examples of A and B satisfying the antecedent of the preceding conditional. Yet one can express doubts about whether there is a sufficient amount of proximities in their views to justify the comparison in question. Clearly, Wittgenstein and Freud knew about each other. Margaret, the sister of the former, was a patient of the latter for a long time, and it is unlikely that she did not inform her brother about the psychoanalytical treatments of Freud. On the other hand, we know nothing about Freud having been influenced by Wittgenstein or having commented on the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In fact, this work was very far from the scientific and philosophical views of the founder of psychoanalysis. Freud would have known that Wittgenstein was associated with the Vienna Circle—a group of philosophers who considered psychoanalysis too metaphysical. In particular, Karl Popper (who regarded himself as not a member of the Circle, though this would not have been known in the 1930s) pointed to psychoanalysis as consisting of a collection of sentences that are unfalsifiable (and so metaphysical, in Popper's understanding). Nevertheless, Freud would not have been aware that Wittgenstein radically departed from his earlier admiration for formal logic and logical atomism, going as the latter did in the direction articulated in his *Philosophical Investigations*, published in 1953. Freud died in London in 1939, when Wittgenstein's new philosophical orientation was

Jan Hertrich-Woleński University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszow, Poland
jwolenski@wsiz.edu.pl 0000-0001-7676-7839

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1, 139–43
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043
Subm. 10 April 2026 Acc. 13 April 2026
DOI: 10.35765/forphil.2026.3101.10

known only to a very small number of philosophers—ones who themselves were rather young and not yet influential in academic circles.

In Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, we find two fragments which might be interpreted as "Freudian." (The use of inverted commas here just serves to indicate that we are dealing with something that is a matter of interpretation). The first passage says that "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language" (§109), and the second that "there is not a single philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, different therapies, as it were" (§133). The phrases "a battle against bewitchment" and "different therapies" can be taken as signposts of a possible connection between psychoanalysis and philosophy in Wittgenstein's second stage of philosophical development. Since philosophy is understood as a battle against bewitchment by language, why not consider this struggle a form of therapy? This way of looking at Wittgenstein's thinking may be strengthened by noting that he made some remarks on Freud's approaches to the psyche and its treatment. Although Wittgenstein was highly critical of psychoanalysis as such, he knew about this approach to mental health. Indeed, the topic we are discussing receives a very nice wording in the title of Jacques Bouveresse's book, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud: The Myth of the Unconscious* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1995). (The latter is a translation of the French original, published in 1991; Bouveresse published several books and papers on the relation between Freud and Wittgenstein). The second part of the quoted title refers to Wittgenstein's view—as Bouveresse understands it—that the unconscious does not exist.

Józef Bremer agrees with Bouveresse (and with the authors of many other works—see the bibliography in the book under review here) that a comparison of Freud and Wittgenstein is not only possible, but even required, if we are to arrive at a better understanding of what is going on in contemporary philosophy. Yet Bremer is perfectly aware that the relation of Wittgenstein to Freud was highly ambiguous and must be reconstructed very carefully. In his "Introduction" to *Wittgenstein on Freud Reexamined*, we read (p. 1):

> Wittgenstein stated that he read Freud just as he concluded that psychology borders with nonsense. Afterwards, he characterized himself as a disciple or a kindred spirit of the latter, declaring him "one of the authors he thought worth reading" (cf. Bouveresse 1995, 3). At the same time, it seems that he was severely critical on of psychoanalysis, calling it "fanciful pseudo-explanation" (Jacobs 2008, 79 ["Freud is Everywhere." In *Freud at 150: 21st-Century Essays on a Man of Genius*, ed. by J.P. Merlino, M.S. Jacobs, J.A. Kaplan, K.L. Moritz, Landham, M D: Jason Aronson 2008, 79–81]). He warned one of his friends,

> who had been studying Freud's theories, that "psychoanalysis is a dangerous and foul practice, and it's done no end of harm and comparatively very little good" (… cf. Harcourt 2017 [E. Harcourt, "Wittgenstein and Psychoanalysis." In *A Companion to Wittgenstein*, ed. by H.-J. Glock and J. Hyman, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2017, 651–66]) . . . Viewed from a . . . critical perspective of reading Wittgenstein's works, Freudian psychoanalysis, for him, seems to exhibit the character of pseudo-religion, pseudoscience, or even mythology. Yet, looking from the point of view proposed by our reexamination of Wittgenstein, we obtain another picture of Wittgenstein's approaches to psychoanalysis.

Bremer points out two facts in the quoted fragment. The first is that Wittgenstein was astonished by the highly effective results of psychoanalytic approaches to therapy, where this success inspired him to adjust his own attempts at enhancing the therapeutic value of philosophizing. The second is that, as Bremer himself aims to show, Wittgenstein's crucial ideas of ordinary-language and language-games, frequently considered to be a bridge between his philosophy and psychoanalysis, have a "much weaker significance" in the context under discussion than that which most authors seek to emphasize. Put another way, the affinities between Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and psychoanalysis show up as accidental and superficial in many respects. Bremer's main task is to offer a better key for understanding the place of psychoanalysis in Wittgenstein's philosophy (see below). The title *Wittgenstein on Freud Reexamined: Psychoanalytic Treatments as Language-Games* indicates that two factors are at work in Bremer's analysis: firstly he claims that the thoughts of Wittgenstein concerning Freud should be reexamined (which implies that prior examinations of the issue have been unsatisfactory), and secondly he holds that this project should be realized through an attempt to view psychoanalytic therapies as language-games.

The book presently under review consists of the following parts (together with a Bibliography and an Index with entries for both persons and topics): the Introduction contains a general characterization of the entire book; Chapter 1 ("Two Biographies: Sigmund Freud and Ludwig Wittgenstein") describes the careers of both thinkers, as well as informing us about English translations of their works; Chapter 2 ("Ordinary Language-Games") is mostly devoted to the philosophy of language of the later Wittgenstein, but with many excursions into applications to psychoanalysis of the ideas outlined in the *Philosophical Investigations*; Chapter 3 ("Philosophical and Psychoanalytical Treatment") considers hypnosis as treated by Wittgenstein and by Freud. More particularly, Section 3 of this chapter analyses

Wittgenstein's philosophy as therapy, while Section 4 explores the language games of psychoanalytic approaches to therapy and the problem of free association as being "the cornerstone of psychoanalytic method." Chapter 4 ("The Complexity of Psychoanalytic Treatment") investigates various components of psychoanalysis as embodying a view about how the human psyche functions. Here, Bremer mentions transference, resistance, repression, fixation, reverie, talking and acting, and also analyses these concepts in the light of the views of Wittgenstein and Freud. Chapter 5 ("Dream Interpretation") is devoted to dreaming as described by Freud and Wittgenstein. A Conclusion (numbered as Chapter 6) completes the main text. The book also has an Appendix, which speaks about psychoanalysis as a scientific psychological theory, and here various approaches to psychoanalysis (in particular, the views of Popper, Adolf Grünbaum and Jürgen Habermas), which are mostly critical, are discussed.

Bremer concludes that "[…] we have offered a new understanding of psychoanalytic treatment from based on Wittgenstein's notion of language-games, and at the same time we have significantly extended the use of this notion" (p. 204). Consequently, the concept of language-games is, basically, crucial to the author's approach to psychoanalysis. This notion is analysed in Chapter 2. The author points out that the word "language-game" has several meanings. Many commentators dealing with Wittgenstein's second philosophical phase have stressed that we can distinguish descriptive and evaluative functions where language-games are concerned. Whereas the former is in play when seeking to give an account of such linguistic phenomena as family resemblance, openness, etc. (Wittgenstein has serious doubts about whether the word "explaining" could be used in this context), the latter qualifies ordinary language-games as being normal, proper, correct, etc. In particular, the principal aim of philosophy insofar as it is "a battle against bewitchment our intelligence by means of our language" consists in showing that departing from ordinary language-games has a privatory impact on our thinking and calls for various therapeutic responses. However, another understanding of the role of language-games in philosophy is also possible: one can say that philosophy itself shows up as a departure from ordinary language-games. (This interpretation is related to the view that regards the Philosophical Investigations as a continuation of the *Tractatus*.)

It is important to note that the adjective "ordinary" has at least two meanings in the context of talk of "ordinary-language" and, *a fortiori*, "ordinary language-games." This was observed by Gilbert Ryle in his essay "Ordinary Language" (*The Philosophical Review* 62, No. 2, 167-186; Bremer does not quote this work). He distinguishes the ordinary use of expressions and

the use of ordinary language. The latter should be replaced by "the usage of ordinary language"—it refers to customs, styles, etc. Now, the ordinary use of expressions is philosophically highly relevant, because it refers to what is standard as contrasted with what is non-standard. In particular, specialized terminologies such as mathematical, physical and logical ones also generate ordinary uses of expressions. So-called "ordinary language philosophy" (the Oxford school that included Ryle, John L. Austin and Peter Strawson) recommended appealing to the ordinary uses of expressions as a basis for assessing the correctness of philosophy. Unfortunately, this recommendation was (and still is) unclear, confusing as it does descriptive and evaluative aspects of being ordinary in language-games. Wittgenstein's second philosophy can be seen as a kind of ordinary philosophy, and the Oxford school as an interpretation of what was proposed in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Yet this historical contextualization of Wittgenstein does not eliminate problems of interpretation with respect to what "ordinary" means in his philosophy. Does it refer to use or usage in Ryle's sense? This is a question which cannot be overlooked.

Clearly, Freudian (or any other psychoanalytic) practice is impossible without making use of the linguistically conveyed reports of patients. If that is so, then saying that psychoanalysts employ the language-games of the persons they are studying (and, perhaps, ones that they themselves use, too) will be quite natural. The next step in this interpretation consists in viewing such data through a Wittgensteinian lens—eventually by extending the scope of the concept of language-games. And, indeed, Bremer offers such a perspective. However, I must raise an objection that stems from my preceding analysis. Freud's interpretation of mental illness was deeply rooted in his general theory of the psyche. (The situation in another versions of psychoanalysis is similar.) Consequently, the treatment of some language-games as standard, and others as non-standard, results from certain definite presuppositions: for instance, that sexuality is the key to the proper diagnosis of the patient. Hence, while viewing the psychoanalytic approach as Bremer does furnishes an interesting philosophical perspective, it seems that psychoanalysis offers much more than "treatment as a language-game." Anyhow, Bremer's book is important because it brings philosophy and psychology closer to one another—something that is always significant for both domains. Let me add the following remark: I am a philosopher, not a psychologist. Hence, I do not feel competent to comment on Bremer's statements about psychoanalysis as such. My remarks about the book reviewed here are mostly limited to what I can say as an analytic philosopher.

Note about *Forum Philosophicum*

Forum Philosophicum is a scholarly journal that seeks new insights into philosophical discussions concerning the relationship between philosophy and faith. The tradition we are rooted in is that of Christian philosophy, understood as the independent exercise of reason in the context of the faith. However, we also welcome proposals that flow from the concerns important to philosophers shaped by other religious traditions, in particular those of Jewish or Muslim heritage. We seek articles that are able to engage in critical debate with evolving views on rationality and its relationship to the irrational, the indeterminate, and the nonbinary, and look forward to receiving analyses that discuss the place of faith and the rationality of faith in such contexts. We encourage discussions of human nature and spirituality that seek to address the proposals of neuroscience and confront the declarations of posthumanists, as well as inquiries into that mode of philosophizing which, while resting on the hermeneutics of culture, gives special emphasis to the hermeneutics of sacred texts. We would like to distinguish our journal by means of its unique approach, rather than through the specificity of the subjects we are prepared to see raised in it: an approach that allows faith to shape, enlighten, and strengthen rationality itself. In this way, we want to offer a true Forum for the community of philosophers who view their faith as a source of inspiration, especially when seeking to face up to the new and challenging forms being given to the ageold problems of philosophy.

Forum Philosophicum is published in English by Ignatianum University Press, part of the Ignatianum University in Cracow. Its two annual issues, published in June and December, together furnish around 30 papers. Until recently, these were published in a range of languages recognized as appropriate for international conferences, but as of 2011 the journal has accepted papers exclusively in English. Since Vol. 31, 2026, it is published

Forum Philosophicum 31 (2026) no. 1
ISSN 1426-1898 e-ISSN 2353-7043

exclusively online, available via the EBSCO Academic Search Complete electronic database (since vol. 6, 2001) and the Philosophy Documentation Center online subscription service (since vol. 1, 1996). Since vol. 23, 2018, all articles have been published in full openaccess model based on Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license. Selected earlier articles are published in open access on the journal's website. The journal is also indexed in, among others, The Philosopher's Index, Atla Religion Database, and the PhilPapers database.

SUBMISSIONS

Forum Philosophicum only accepts submissions in English. We publish papers, cycles of papers, discussions and book reviews. Papers submitted for consideration in *Forum Philosophicum* cannot exceed 15,000 words, including footnotes and bibliography. They should be preceded by an abstract not exceeding 200 words. Manuscripts should be submitted via our website at:
https://czasopisma.ignatianum.edu.pl/fp
All papers accepted for publication will go through a linguistic review process to ensure the utmost clarity and accessibility of submissions.

CONTACT INFORMATION
Forum Philosophicum
Ignatianum University in Cracow
ul. Kopernika 26, 31501 Kraków, Poland
(main building, room 310)
E-MAIL forum.philosophicum@ignatianum.edu.pl
PHONE +48 12 39 99 661
WEBSITE https://czasopisma.ignatianum.edu.pl/fp

PUBLISHER INFORMATION
Ignatianum University Press
ul. Kopernika 26, 31501 Kraków, Poland
Wydawnictwo WAM (main building, room 358)
PHONE +48 12 39 99 620
FAX +48 12 39 99 501
EMAIL: wydawnictwo@ignatianum.edu.pl

Review process

The review process for papers submitted to *Forum Philosophicum* adheres to the following guidelines:

1. A paper submitted to the Editor may be returned to the author if it does not meet the criteria described in the section Sumbissions, or if it does not discuss a topic within a subjectarea of interest to *Forum Philosophicum*.
2. Each paper will be sent to two reviewers for blind review. At least one of the reviewers must be affiliated to an institution in a different country than the author.
3. Members of the Board, including the Editor, are not allowed to write reviews. No specialist who is known to be related to the author or who may reasonably be thought to have collaborated with the author or supervised his / her work is eligible as a reviewer.
4. Reviewers are explicitly asked to focus on the research and philosophical merits of a paper; they are told that any linguistic and/or technical deficiencies pertaining to an otherwise good paper may be dealt with separately by the editors.
5. The reviewers are asked to conclude their review with a clear opinion, stating that a paper is (a) publishable without revisions, or (b) may be published after minor revisions have been introduced, or (c) may be resubmitted after major revision, or (d) should not be considered for publication at all.
6. The final decision concerning which of the papers that have obtained at least one positive review are to be published is taken by the EditorinChief, in consultation with the Editorial Board.
7. The names and affiliations of all reviewers are published annually on the website of the journal.

Legal issues

 Authors of papers that have been accepted will be asked to grant the publisher the royaltyfree right to first publication, as well as a nonexclusive right to distribute and archive the paper in electronic format, including through organizations specializing in the distribution and archiving of scholarly journals. It should be understood that the fact of publication constitutes the sole form of remuneration to be received by authors.

Financing

All authors whose research is supported by special sources of financing, such as grants, research programs, etc., are asked to prepare an information note mentioning the support they have received. Originality Forum Philosophicum will only accept manuscripts of papers not previously published in, or submitted to and still currently under review by, another journal or collection.

The Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education requires the editors of all Polish journals which they evaluate to follow certain basic rules of scientific honesty, as defined by Committee on Publication Ethics. While we strongly believe that the authors submitting papers to Forum have no intention whatsoever of breaking those rules, and while the rules pertaining to joint authorship are rarely applicable to papers submitted to a philosophical journal, we consider it important to reiterate some of those rules to our authors. Thus, we remind authors that it is not acceptable to submit papers that reflect anything other than original research or reflections conducted by the author himself / herself. Concealing the true authorship of a part of a paper, even if the paper is in itself an original contribution, also constitutes a breach of such rules. Since all papers are reviewed by specialists, those seeking to make a submission should work on the assumption that any and all instances of plagiarism or ghostwriting will be detected. For jointly authored papers, a clear indication must be given in the paper itself of the manner and extent of each and every author's contribution. Papers with socalled "guest authors," whose contribution to the thesis of the paper is actually minimal, cannot be accepted. All cases of academic dishonesty, if detected, will be reported to the organizations with which the authors are affiliated.