THE PERSON, A MEANINGFUL NOTION IN BIOETHICS.
A PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

ADRIAN MĂGDICI[1]

REZUMAT. *Persoana*, o noţiune cu tâlc pentru bioetică. O abordare filosofico-teologică. Noţiunea contemporană de persoană, golită de fundamentul ontologic şi axată pe fragilul atribut al raţionalităţii, în loc să le fie de folos fiinţelor umane lipsite de apărare, tinde să devină mai degrabă o subtilă unealtă eugenetică. În alte cuvinte, pe măsură ce dezinteresul faţă de dimensiunea metafizică a omului creşte, graniţa dintre bioetică şi thanatoetică devine din ce în ce mai lichidă, iar idea de persoană tot mai şubredă. Scopul reflexiei noastre, aşadar, este acela de a încerca să redescoperim contextul originar în care s-a afirmat noţiunea de persoană şi, prin urmare, sensul meta-fizic al persoanei, indispensabil pentru o antropologie sănătoasă şi pentru o bioetică genuină.

Cuvinte-cheie: *persoană, bioetică, concepţie despre viaţă, materialism, hilemorfism, meta-fizică, teologie, Dumnezeu*

ABSTRACT. The contemporary notion of person, devoid of ontological basis and built on the fragile characteristic of rationality, is not useful in defending defenceless human beings. Instead, it rather tends to become a subtle eugenic tool. In other words, the less we are interested in the metaphysical aspect of human life, the more fluid becomes the boundary between bioethics and what we may call thanato-ethics, while the concept of person gets flimsier than ever. The goal of the following reflections is therefore to try to rediscover the original context which allowed full expression of the notion of person and, consequently, to rediscover the meta-physical sense of the human person, which is imperative for a healthy anthropology and a genuine bioethics.

Keywords: *person, bioethics, worldview, materialism, hylomorphism, meta-physics, theology, God*

---

[1] *Assistant lecturer, PhD., The Franciscan Roman-Catholic Theological Institute, Faculty of Pastoral Theology, Roman (NT), Romania. Email: adypellegrino@yahoo.it*

Introduction

The word *tâlc* is defined in any Romanian language dictionary in terms such as: "meaning", "sense", "purpose", "significance", but also through the phrase "profound, hidden meaning", which opens way to the meaning of mystery. As for the Romanian adverbial phrase *cu tâlc*, one of its meanings is that of "allusion", which, in turn, refers to what cannot be directly understood, to what can be sensed only when it appears into a certain context. Thus, the purpose of this paper's title is to remind us that, on one hand, *the person* is a fundamental notion for anthropological reflection and that, on the other hand, the mystery surrounding this notion requires sustained effort to clarify its essence by rediscovering the original context in which it was affirmed: Christian theology (Ratzinger 1990, 439).

The Origin of the Concept of *Person* Promoted by Contemporary Society

Contemporary society, characterized by an unquenched thirst for consumption (Schwartz 2004, 70-75) and thus attracted in a dizzying chase after novelty, tends to perceive reality – objects, living beings, even human persons – as the results of fleeting accidents, like ripples crossing the global oceans. Entities seem so inconsistent that people feel dissolved (Levi-Strauss 1962, 326), lost in anonymity within a *fluid* world (Bauman 2000, 110-129), a world where "the liquid modern 'tyranny of the moment', with its precept of *carpe diem*" seems to replace the traditional *memento mori* (Bauman 2007, 104).

The world view fostered by a specific society inevitably includes a certain view on the human person, which, in its turn, will determine the type of bioethics adopted in everyday life. This means that "ethical norms are the fruit of a specific conception of man, and every conception of man is the fruit of a specific conception of reality, of existence in its totality" (Rovighi 1976, 216).

Yet, the ultimate purpose of the world does not present itself as *immediately* accessible to our mind, but it remains somehow "outside" the world itself (Wittgenstein 2001, 56), requiring, in order to be understood, a hermeneutics similar to the one proposed by St Paul: "At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face" (*1 Cor* 13:12). Man, therefore, as long as he is endowed with the capacity to reflect upon himself, is bound to have a worldview, but the worldview he fosters implies a choice (Delumeau

2001, 18; Nagel 2012, 5-7, 42-47), a choice which will lead, as underlined above, to outlining a certain concept of human person and of bioethics. *The religious man*, no matter the historical context of his life, "always believes that there is an absolute reality, *the sacred*, which transcends this world". *The profane man*, on the contrary, "refuses all appeal to transcendence". He "*makes himself*, and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world" (Eliade 1957, 202-203).

The *de*-sacralisation of the person gained momentum in the 17th century, when *the person* was redefined on empirical basis:

"To find wherein *personal identity* consists, we must consider what *person* stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it; it being impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving that he does perceive" (Locke 1801, 54).

David Hume, an empirical philosopher and adept of radical scepticism, deepened the *de*-ontologization of the person by advancing a doubt on the existence of the *subject*, the classical receptacle of experiences:

"When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception" (Hume 1739, 252).

The same philosopher considered that "our idea of any mind is only that of particular perceptions without the notion of anything we call substance, either simple or compound" (id. 2007, 142).

Hume was certainly wrong, since "our idea of 'a mind' (if by 'a mind' we mean, as Hume usually does, a person, or a self) is not an idea only of 'particular perceptions'", but "it is an idea of that which loves or hates, and of that which feels cold or warm [...]". Therefore, our perceptions "are not entities in their own right; they are 'accidents'" (Chisholm 1969, 9, 17) requiring support (Farris 2012, 63), which means an "individual substance of rational nature" (Boezio 1979, 326). Yet, modern thinking has laid the basis of a mostly psychological (Harris 2001, 14-20; Rechlin 2008, 9), phenomenological and analytical concept of the person (Chisholm 1969, 7), a vision which will deeply influence contemporary anthropology (Parfit 1984) and especially bioethics (Fornero 2005, 87-89).

On the other hand, the 18th century, which brings affirmation of human rights, also sees a *re*-sacralisation of the person and this change in

perceiving the sacred led to a reformation of the penal system (Joas 2013, 58). Sociologist Émile Durkheim, a zealous defender of human rights and universal human dignity, wrote:

"The human person, whose definition serves as the touchstone according to which good must be distinguished from evil, is considered as sacred, in what one might call the ritual sense of the word. It has something of that transcendental majesty which the churches of all times have given to their gods. It is conceived as being invested with that mysterious property which creates an empty space around holy objects, which keeps them away from profane contacts and which draws them away from ordinary life. And it is exactly this feature which induces the respect of which it is the object" (Durkheim 1975, 61).

Nevertheless, afterwards, while modern empiric thought turned into positivism and neo-positivism, *the person* was again under attack, torn down from the pedestal of metaphysics and thrown directly on the dissection table of scientific reasoning. Thus, right after the Second World War, country delegates who, at the initiative of the United Nations, laid the foundation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted "the meta-language of a universal secular order" (Arieli 2002, 8), with the purpose of avoiding disagreement on metaphysical and religious issues and obtaining consensus from peoples and cultures from all over the world. As the basis of human rights, they established *dignity*, an ambiguous and discriminatory Kantian concept (Schroeder 2010, 121) which, unlike the other two proposed – *God* and *natural law* (Pizzorni 2006, 478) – reflects an ethical vision (Kant 1991, 230) rather than an ontological position (Glendon 1999, 12-13).

The shudder of horror produced by the atrocities of the Second World War indeed required speeding the process of adopting the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, but, as it seemed impossible to reach a theoretical agreement, a practical one was preferred, which aimed at a practical outcome [international cooperation]. Philosopher Jacques Maritain, who had the leading role in drafting the *Declaration*, remembers:

"At one of the meetings of a UNESCO National Commission where Human Rights were being discussed, someone expressed astonishment that certain champions of violently opposed ideologies had agreed on a list of those rights. 'Yes', they said, 'we agree about the rights but on condition that no one asks us why'. That 'why' is where the argument begins" (Maritain 1948, i).

Therefore, despite its powerful moral implications, the concept of *dignity* is elusive, lacks solid theoretical foundation (Di Pietro & Moltisanti 2009, 72) and some bioethicists consider it useless in medical practice

(Macklin 2003, 1419). But we shouldn't forget that ideas in our mind can be like a machete in the hand of a man lost in the jungle: they can help us survive and advance towards *the light*; they are an expression of our perseverance and strength. Finding among the flimsy words of human language a suitable concept to justify our faith in man's inalienable value is not only a matter of etymology, but of applied sense. In other words, why, unlike other living beings, we, humans, are so convinced we have dignity? (Brungardt 2011, 13) And the answer is, of course, none other than this: *Because we are human persons*.

But what is *the person*, this "*paradoxical reality*" (Mouroux 1953, 105), considered so sublime that it deserves to be infinitely worthier than any other entity in the whole universe (Baumann 2007, 7), while others consider it so earthly and subject to the vicissitudes of the evolutionary process that is hardly distinguishable from other animals like monkeys or dolphins? (DeGrazia 2006, 44; White 2007, 155-184)

Materialist thinkers (Dennett 1991, 33; see Lund 2014, 56 and BonJour 2010, 3, 5-21) don't see any difference – at least not an essential one – between the death of a man and that of an animal, because "the death of a person is the death of an organism". In other words, "the permanent end of consciousness, of intentionality, and of subjectivity is literally an organic disintegration of the person". Thinking differently "is to be dualistic" (Van Hooft 2004, 156). And, if one wishes to avoid being labelled like that, one must consider human beings from a strictly empirical point of view, assimilating it with a "biological thing" (Boklage 2010, 1) of the species *Homo sapiens* ["biological person"], an entity which, in order to be granted the statute of a "psychological person", needs a functioning brain and an intellectually and morally conscious mind (Feldman 1992, 119-120). And, taking into account that the Lockean definition of the person has become axiomatic for science (Harris 2001, 25; Müller 2011, 86), most bioethicists and medical researchers think that embryos, foetuses, anencephalics and those in a *persistent vegetative state* are not, or at least not anymore, *persons*, because they haven't formed their cerebral structures yet, or because these structures are insufficient, or because they have suffered irreparable damage to their cerebral cortex, which has made them irreversibly lose their cognitive capacity. But based on what principle can science decide whether a being is a *person*, since science is "only one system of investigation within that larger arena of human study of nature, persons, and society"? (Tauber 2009, 125) And who can guarantee that the Lockean definition of the *person* is correct? (Butler 1906, 257-263; Reid 2008, 113-118; Paterson 2008, 133-135)

The contemporary concept of the *person* (Beauchamp 1999, 319), just like the one of *dignity* (Thiel 2010, 51; Warnock 1983, 242)*,* "is used in a variety of contexts" (Gregersen 2000, 1), seeming somehow "adjustable to the different requisitions of the philosophical pluralism which characterizes the bioethical debate". The thorny aspect of this *flexibility* however, is that "the notion of person, having been separated from its roots, is assigned today many roles which endanger its intuitive and original potential", which has paradoxically led to using it "'against' man himself" (Palazzani 2004, 1357). On the other hand, when shedding light on the person, one of the biggest temptations of contemporary man is to try and get the deep meaning of the concept by analytical methodology or through a strictly scientific approach, as if solving the mystery depended more on the propriety of terms or empirical knowledge than on reflecting about the inner aspect of the beings in question (Skrbina 2014, 220). Actually, the emphasis must be on the *meta*-physical origin of the *person* (Sesboüé 2002, 324), and the analytical and/or scientific method should come second, as it is only logical that its value will be determined by the answer somebody gives to the first question mentioned above (Weisstub & Thomasma 2001, 325-326). That is why we have preferred to postpone the traditional etymological analysis we should have begun with, but now we shall try and undertake this task.

The Mysterious Etymology of the *Person*-concept

The origins of this concept remain mysterious despite the numerous attempts to elucidate it (Milano 1996, 63).

First, in Ancient Greece, while the idea of person had not appeared yet, they used generic terms like τις [someone] or ἄνθρωπος [man] to refer to the human being. When they wanted to be more specific, they used words like σῶμα [body], ψυχή [soul] and θυμός [vital breath]; these principles make the actual human being (Nédoncelle 1948, 277) and – as shown in the Homeric poems – they also guarantee a double existence for the human being: one visible and limited, based on body [σῶμα] and vital breath [θυμός], the other invisible and immortal, based on ψυχή, which is subsisting soul (Rohde 1925, 6). Then came another term that was given priority: πρόσωπον, which means *face*. It is worth mentioning that this term will also be granted the meaning of *mask*, which was initially used in religious rituals and then on the stage, thus allowing both actors and participants to the sacred ceremonies to re-*animate*

[personify] those who could not express themselves as real flesh-and-bone persons.

Ancient Romans also referred to the human being with generic words such as *is* [he, that one], *homo* [man], *caput* [individual], but also with terms like *corpus* [body], *anima* [soul] etc. Yet, unlike the Greek πρόσωπον, the Latin term of *persona* [mask] – which is instrumental to our analysis – is much more difficult to define from an etymological point of view, as it has seen a much more complicated semantic evolution (Nédoncelle 1948, 285). In the 2nd century AD, Latin scholar Aulus Gellius, following in the footsteps of grammarian Gavius Bassus and his *De Origine Vocabulorum* [a work now lost], considered that the term of *persona* was derived from the verb *personare,* since the mask [*persona*] entirely covers the face of the wearer and only lets the voice out thorough a single opening, the one in front of the mouth, which makes the voice clearer and more resounding (Aulus 1762, 391-392). There were other etymologies proposed later, although most of them are debatable, for instance the definition from Papias the Lombard's glossary [11th century], *persona dicitur quia per se sonat*, or the one from grammarian Pacidus' glossary [6th century], also mentioned by Thomas Aquinas, *persona eo quod per se una est*, or Giulio Cesare della Scala's hypothesis [1484-1558] according to which *persoana* comes from περι-σῶμα, in Latin *circum-corpus*, a phrase meaning "around the body" (Nédoncelle 1948, 286).

Finally, one of the most plausible hypotheses regarding the origin of the term *persona* seems to be the one leading to ΦΕΡΣΥ [*Phersu*], an Etruscan word written next to a representation of a masked dancing individual on a fresco from the grave named *Tomba degli Auguri*, discovered in the Italian region of Corneto-Tarquinia (Milano 1996, 64). This mysterious character, *Phersu*, most probably an Etruscan god of the dead, has led to *persona*, the mask Romans wore during the ceremonies for the dead [*imagines mortuorum* or *animorum*] (Ribas Alba 2011, 121-123). As a matter of fact, *persona* was not only the mask worn by the actors in the ceremony, but also "a support-representation of the deceased's soul" (Barcelo 2013, 308).

Is *Bioethics* a Meaningful Notion for the Person?

In the *Introduction*, when we explained the purpose of the title chosen for this article, we purposefully mentioned that one of the meanings of the Romanian adverbial/adjectival phrase *cu tâlc* is that of "in allusion

to/alluding", referring to something that cannot be fully understood outside of a certain context. That is why, before trying to see how the notion of *person* is meaningful [*cu tâlc*] for bioethics, we could wonder what really is *the meaning of bioethics* and whether *bioethics* is a *meaningful* notion for the person.

A few decades have passed since moral philosophers and medical science researchers realized that ethics, if not incarnated within bioethics, remains an arid and abstract reflection (Arras 1994, 983), risking to contradict its original essence, its *ethos*, its "abode, dwelling place" (Heidegger 1998, 269). Heidegger, reviving an anecdote mentioned by Aristotle, tells how some strangers who had wanted very much to meet the famous Heraclitus were totally disappointed when they saw him warming up by a baker's oven just like ordinary people. They expected to find him lost in cogitation, detached of bodily needs. But the philosopher, aware of the people's expectations, did not feel embarrassed, but invited them to join him, saying: "Here too the gods come to presence" (ibid., 270). *Ethos* therefore is revealing because, if we take into account the fact that the Heraclitean universe is divine, the value of each of its entities arises from its very ontological structure, just like the dignity of each human springs from one's own δαίμων, which is one's own divine feature. Actually, Heraclitus, also named The Obscure, would concentrate his own anthropological vision in an aphorism formed by only three words: ἦθος ἀνθρὼπωι δαίμων, *the man's abode is his own soul/conscience* (Robb 1986, 339-340).

Neo-positivism, though, adopting the so-called "Hume's law" (see Hume 1739, 469), has established that morality cannot be deduced from empirical reality (Moore 1903, 9-10) and, although positivist ideology has collapsed, science still uses this old rule. This state of facts owes to the world vision shared by most of today's scientists (Larson 1998, 313) – it is called *philosophical naturalism* – and on its basis notions like *person*, *dignity* or *the meaning of life* are considered mere fictions, impossible to categorize from an empirical point of view and without relation whatsoever with a hypothetical transcendent origin (Mitchell et al. 2007, 36-37).

But ethics embodied in bioethics is living proof that our real "abode", the biosphere, is related to *ethos*. From this point of view, *ethos* is the laborious harmony between *micro-* and *macro-*symbiosis, a harmony imposing respect as it is our own harmony, too, the vital space and under-layer of human existence (Kauffman 2008, 259-272). Therefore, the conception saying that facts cannot convey values is groundless (MacIntyre 2007, 148-150); on the contrary, the simple fact that the *biosphere* is a complex network of symbiotic relations does represent, beyond all human considerations, a value in itself, because it guarantees life for all biological entities (Mashe 1975, 29-39). The simple fact

that we come into the world with the "yuck factor" (Caulfield & Chapman 2005, 0737) incorporated and therefore we intuitively feel disgusted by torture, homicide and so on is revelatory enough proof that "morality isn't a superficial feature of our world" (Copan 2008, 143). We are also convinced that, to be able to fulfil its purpose, especially when the human person is reduced to its biological aspect, bioethics needs a robust *meta*-bioethical foundation, not only through more cohesive interdisciplinarity, but also from a *meta*-physical point of view (Russo 2004, 737-739). And the Boethian concept of *person* subscribes to this very *meta*-physical point of view (Marenbon 2003, 72).

The *Meta*-physical Concept of Person and Its Relevance for Bioethics

The classical definition of the *person* by Boethius – *naturae rationalis individua substantia* [*individual substance of rational nature*] – since it does not take into account the human being, having as purpose to clarify some aspects of the Trinity (Forrest 2003, 75; Buchanan 1962, 21) and of Christology, ignores man's corporality (De Monticelli 2006, 4-5). St Thomas Aquinas realizes that the Boethian definition lacks any reference to corporality and, wanting to fight the spiritualist trend of his own age, amends it:

"For person in general signifies the individual substance of a rational nature. The individual in itself is undivided, but is distinct from others. Therefore person in any nature signifies what is distinct in that nature: thus in human nature it signifies this flesh, these bones, and this soul, which are the individuating principles of a man, and which, though not belonging to person in general, nevertheless do belong to the meaning of a particular human person" (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 29, a. 4 co).

A few pages before in his *Summa*, St Thomas mentions:

"The soul is a part of the human species; and so, although it may exist in a separate state, yet since it ever retains its nature of unibility, it cannot be called an individual substance, which is the hypostasis or first substance [...]; thus neither the definition nor the name of person belongs to it" (ibid., I, q. 29, a. 1 ad 5).

St Thomas' thinking, though, can leave us perplexed (Quinn 2004, 88-89): if it is true that the soul, after a man's death, is neither **hypostasis** [individual substance], nor **person** [*individual substance of rational nature*], then what is it? Is it an attribute, an accident? (Amerini 2009, 72; Kenny 2004, 28) Can an *attribute* subsist without any individuality/consistency/substantiality

whatsoever? (Oaklander 2001, 185) If the soul separated from the body is neither *person*, nor *individual substance*, then what are **those who**, according to Catholic doctrine, "still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven"? (CCCC 2006, no 210) In this case, there are two possibilities: either the human soul possesses a special intellect (Wippel 2002, 114-140) – different from the *synaptic* one (LeDoux 2002) – and therefore it is personal *meta*-physical conscience (Spencer 2014, 863-912) which allows it to subsist after death (Eben 2012, 85) [even if normally it exists as a *human* person], or it has no individuality – no personality and, in this case, it disintegrates together with the deceased's body (Kenny 2004, 28).

The only way to solve this dilemma is to admit that the separated soul is essentially a *person* ["minimal-person" (Helm 1978, 16)], similar to bodiless intellectual beings [God and the angels] (Marenbon 2003, 72), and that, in this hypostasis, it tends to regain what is essential to its *humanity*. Actually, in a document of the *Holy Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith*, St Thomas Aquinas' hylomorphic definition of the *person* is challenged: "Temporal life lived in this world is not identified with the person. The person possesses a level of life that is more profound and that cannot end" (SCDF 1975, no 9).

Human person is certainly, as it results from different theological affirmations (Giovanni P II 1986, no 3-5; CCC 2003, no 362), *a dual unity*, but this *duality* actually does not concern those who belong to the *person* "genus" [God, angels] (Murphy 2008, 57; McArdle 2006, 5), but rather one of its "species", the *human* one (Lund 2009, 13). Therefore, from an anthropological point of view, dual is not the *person*, but the man, who, in addition to his natural bio-psychological configuration, is also supernaturally imbued by a *meta*-physical ego whom we shall name *personal immortal soul* (Masset 1983, 321, 339).

Both science [through discoveries confirming evolution] and faith [thanks to Christology] force us to consider human individuals from different perspectives, one natural, due to man's bio-psychological configuration, and one supernatural, taking into account his immortal soul. Therefore, when we say *human person*, we refer to an entity which is part of the *human* bio-psychological species, is inclined to develop a spatial-temporal mind [conscience] (Corradini 2008, 205-206; Holmes 2005, 15) and, from the very first moment of its activation in a human sense, has been endowed with an immortal *meta*-physical ego. The two aspects, material [bio-psychological] and spiritual [*meta*-physical] (see Possenti 2014, 28; Zimmerman 2011, 168; Casey 2011, 342-343; Lewis 2007, 37) forces us to keep our distance from Tomist anthropology (see *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3; Blazquez 1983, 284, 287, 290).

The first motive of our reticence regarding Tomist doctrine of the *rational-immortal-configurator* soul (Eberl 2006, 5, 8-9) owes to the fact that

this, if we seriously consider the phenomenon of evolution, should evolve together with the matter that it configures (Hasker 2011, 210), a hypothesis which has not been accepted by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church (Giovanni P II 2009, 355).

The second reason for our reticence to Tomist hylomorphism is related to Christology. Different magisterial documents show that "only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" (Paolo VI 1985, no 22; CDF 2011, no 7). In the incarnate Word there must be something which is also in us (Sesboüé 2002, 322, 334), and finding that *something* should enlighten us. Just like the incarnate Word, through His humanity, is the visible hypostasis of the invisible God [one of the Holy Trinity's *Persons*], just the same, or in any case similarly, the human being, through one's [bio-psychological] body, is the visible hypostasis of the immortal personal soul, which is invisible; and this truth becomes ever more obvious when we take into account the fact that "at its roots, the notion of person is imbued with theology" (Palazzani 1998, 56; Zizioulas 1997, 27). Therefore, by the incarnation of the Word, God – as unlikely as it may seem (Nagel 2012, 26) – knows all the vicissitudes of natural order despite the fact that, being part of the eternal communion between the Holy Trinity's Persons, is not governed by natural law, thus suggesting that the *person* is not an essentially *hylomorphic* [informed matter] or empirical reality.

An example as conclusive as is possible in this direction is the definition of the *person* made by theologian Richard de Saint-Victor – "divinae naturae incommunicabilis existentia" – *incommunicable existence of divine nature* (De Saint-Victor 1958, 187) – a definition which reflects a profound *meta*-physical intuition. But this intuition has not been accordingly valued by Christians:

"Scholastic theology developed categories of existence out of this contribution given by Christian faith to the human mind. Its defect was that it limited these categories to Christology and to the doctrine of the Trinity [...]. This seems to me also the limit of St. Thomas in the matter, namely, that within theology he operates, with Richard of St. Victor, on the level of existence, but treats the whole thing as a theological exception, as it were. In philosophy [...] he remains faithful to the different approach of pre-Christian philosophy" (Ratzinger 1990, 449).

Thus, if the Persons of the Holy Trinity and especially that of the incarnated Word are considered as "theological exceptions", which do not tell anything in relation to our *meta*-physical status, and similarly, if the Person of the eternal incarnated Word – Who has become a human individual from the moment of conception – does not say anything about our human individuality, then by what else could the incarnate Word illuminate us?

In our opinion, *the person* – and Christology confirms this – is not an immanent naturalistic category (Caspar 1991, 408-411), but a *meta*-physical ego (Mauss 1938, 278). In fact, from a historical point of view, we have not started from the idea of "man" to get to that of "human person" and "divine person", but, on the contrary, we have started from the idea of "divine person" to establish the parameters of the "human person" and, therefore to see whether these parameters are still compatible with those that science uses about man today (Bertagna 2006, 51-52).

Paradoxically, the hylomorphic concept of *person*, although it was founded by St Thomas Aquinas to fight the spiritualists who despised the body, due to some Aristotelian inadvertences (Müller 1996, 21-26; Gardel 2012, 4165), has today become an argument for philosophers and bioethicists willing to justify various crimes against human being, especially against those human beings who are either in an incipient or in a final stage of their existence (Glannon 2000, 49-69).

Conclusion

The hylomorphic concept of the *person*, subordinated to Aristotle's philosophy and therefore the fruit of an immanent vision (Wojtyla 1978, 108-109), is an "affront to human dignity" (Shostak 2006, 1). In the context of contemporary physics and biology, hylomorphism is rather an outdated attempt to describe a complex variety of entities – with their gradual transition-evolution from pure materiality to more and more bio-*logical* specifications – through a cliché like the concept of *form* (Shields 2007, 293; Williams 2006, 225-226) and through a disturbing procession of vitalist *souls* (Dupre 2002, 155; Mariani 2003, 98; Bennett 2010, 56; Amerini 2009, 37-38). And, since the origin of "the modern crisis of the concept 'person' lies in the crisis of Christianity and of traditional metaphysics" (Zaborowski 2010, 183), the rediscovery of the forgotten sense of the person can only be done by "destroying the zoological understanding of the human person" (Housset 2007, 18). We should not, therefore, confuse the metaphysics of the world, in which man takes part as a biological individual (Mauron 2002, 958-959), with the supernatural *meta*-physics in which the *person* takes part (Bonaventura 2012, 97, 99). If we accept a two-layered ontology, similar to the one which governs Christology, many bioethical thorny issues could be solved much more easily. That is why, in our opinion, the *meta*-physical concept of *person* is much more desirable than the hylomorphic one, since it is much easier to manipulate the latter in bioethical debates.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amerini, Fabrizio (2009), *Tommaso d'Aquino. Origine e fine della vita umana*, Pisa: Edizioni ETS.

Arieli, Yehoshua (2002), "On the Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for the Emergence of the Doctrine of the Dignity of Man and His Rights", in D. Kretzmer, E. Klein (eds), *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, The Hague, London and New York: Kluwer Law International, pp. 1-18.

Arras, John D. (1994), "Principles and Particularity: The Role of Cases in Bioethics", in *Indiana Law J*, 69(4), 983-1014.

Aulus, Gellius (1762), *Noctivum Atticarvm*, Lipsiae: Gotth. Theophili Georgii.

Barcelo, Rafael R. (2013), *Notas sobre la historia del concepto de persona*, in *Index: Quaderni camerti di studi romanistici. International Survey of Roman Law*, no 41, 305-312.

Bauman, Zygmunt (2000), *Liquid Modernity*, Malden (MA): Polity Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt (2007), *Consuming Life*, Malden (MA): Polity Press.

Baumann, Peter (2007), "Persons, Human Beings, and Respect", in *Polish Journal of Philosophy*, 1(2), 5-17.

Beauchamp, Tom L. (1999), "The Failure of Theories of Personhood", in *Kennedy Inst Ethics J*, 9(4), 309-324.

Bennett, Jane (2010), *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Bertagna, Giuseppe, "Pedagogia «dell'uomo» e pedagogia «della persona umana»: il senso di una differenza", in G. Bertagna (ed), *Scienze della persona: perché?*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, pp. 17-74.

Blázquez, Niceto (1983), "La pena de muerte según Santo Tomás y el abolicionismo moderno", in *Revista Chilena de Derecho*, 10(2), 277-316.

Boezio (1979), *La consolazione della filosofia – Gli opuscoli teologici*, Milano: Rusconti.

Boklage, Charles E. (2010), *How New Humans Are Made: Cells and Embryos, Twins and Chimeras, Left and Right, Mind/Self/Soul, Sex, and Schizophrenia*, Singapore: World Scientific.

Bonaventura (2012), *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, in C. Leonardi (ed), *La letteratura francescana*, vol. 3, Milano: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla & Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, pp. 25-109.

BonJour, Laurence (2010), "Against Materialism", in R. C. Koons, G. Bealer (eds), *The Waning of Materialism*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-23.

Brungardt, Gerard S. (2011), "The Face of the Other. Why We Treat the Human Person Differently", in *J Med Pers*, 9(1), 13-16.

Buchanan, Emerson (1962), *Aristotle's Theory of Being*, Cambridge (MA): Mississippi University.

Butler, Joseph (1906), *The Analogy of Religion*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, LTD.

Casey, Thomas G. (2011), "Il ritorno dell'anima", in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4(3874), 339-350.

Caspar, Philippe (1991), "La problématique de l'animation de l'embryon. Survol historique et enjeux dogmatiques", in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 113(3), 400-413.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Compendium [CCCC] (2006), Washington, DC: USCCB.

Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica [CCC] (2003), Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Caulfield, Timothy, Audrey Chapman, "Human Dignity as a Criterion for Science Policy", in *PLoS Med*, 2(8), 0736-0738.

Chisholm, Roderick M. (1969), "On the Observability of the Self", in *Philos Phenomenol Res*, 30(1), 7-21.

Congregazione per la Dottrina Fede [CDF] (2011), *Dignitas personae. Alcune questioni di bioetica* (8 settembre 2008), in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 25, *Documenti ufficiali della Santa Sede 2008*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, pp. 789-853.

Copan, Paul (2008), "God, Naturalism, and the Foundations of Morality", in R. B. Steward (ed), *The Future of Atheism: Alister McGrath and Daniel Dennett in Dialogue*, Minneapolis (MN): Fortress Press, pp. 141-161.

Corradini, Antonella (2008), "Emergent Dualism", in A. Antonietti, A. Corradini, J. Lowe, *Psycho-Physical Dualism Today: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Lanham (MD): Lexington Books, pp. 185-209.

De Monticelli, Roberta (2006), "Subjectivity and Essential Individuality – A Dialogue With Peter Van Inwagen and Lynne Baker", in *Networks*, 6, 1-20.

De Saint-Victor, Richard (1958), *De Trinitate*, Paris: J. Vrin.

DeGrazia, David (2006), "On the Question of Personhood Beyond Homo Sapiens", in P. Singer (ed), *In Defence of Animals: The Second Wave*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 40-53.

Delumeau, Jean (2001), "The Development of the Concept of Personhood", in D. C. Thomasma, D. N. Weisstub, C. Hervé (eds), *Personhood and Health Care*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 13-18.

Dennett, Daniel C. (1991), *Consciousness Explained*, New York and London: Little, Brown and Co.

Di Pietro, Maria L., Dino Moltisanti (2009), "La dignità nel dibattito bioetico", in I. Sanna (ed), *Dignità umana e dibattito bioetico*, Roma: Edizioni Studium, pp. 69-82.

Dupré, John (2002), *Humans and Other Animals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Durkheim, Émile (1975), „Individualism and the Intellectuals", in W.S.F. Pickering (ed), *Durkheim on Religion*, London: Routledge, pp. 59-73.

Eben, Alexander (2012), *Proof of Heaven. A Neurosurgeon's Journey Into the Afterlife*, London: Piatkus.

Eberl, Jason T. (2006), *Thomistic Principles and Bioethics*, New York: Routledge.

Eliade, Mircea (1957), *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

Farris, Joshua R. (2012), "The Soul-Concept: Meaningfully Disregard or Meaningfully Embrace", in *Annales* Philosophici, no 5, 59-68.

Feldman, Fred (1992), *Confrontations with the Reaper: A Philosophical Study of the Nature and Value of Death*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Fornero, Giovanni (2005), *Bioetica cattolica e bioetica laica*, Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

Forrest, Peter (2003), "The Trinity and Personal Identity", in M. Y. Stewart (ed), *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 75-82.

Gardel, Margaret L. (2012), "Living Matter - Nexus of Physics and Biology in the 21st Century", in *Mol Biol Cell*, 23(21), 4165-4166.

Giovanni P. II (1986), "L'uomo, immagine di Dio, è un essere spirituale e corporale" (Udienza generale, 16 aprile 1986), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX/1, 1986, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, pp. 1036-1047.

Giovanni P. II (2009), "Discorso per la Sessione plenaria su «L'origine e l'iniziale evoluzione della vita»", in S. M. Sorondo (ed), *I papi e la scienza nell'epoca contemporanea*, Milano: Jaca Book, pp. 352-356.

Glannon, Walter (2000), "Tracing the Soul: Medical Decisions at the Margins of Life", in *Christ Bioeth*, 6(1), 49-69.

Glendon, Marry A. (1999), "Foundations of Human Rights: The Unfinished Business", in *Am J Juris*, 44(1), 1-14.

Gregersen, Henrik N. (2000), „Varieties of Personhood: Mapping the Issues", in H. N. Gregersen, W. B. Drees, U. Görman (eds), *The Human Person in Science and Religion*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, pp. 1-17.

Harris, John (2001), *The Value of Life*, London and New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Hasker, William (2011), "Souls Beastly and Human", in M. C. Baker, S. Goetz (eds), *The Soul Hypothesis: Investigation into Existence of the Soul*, New York: Continuum, pp. 202-217.

Heidegger, Martin (1998), *Pathmarks*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Helm, Paul (1978), "A theory of disembodied survival and re-embodied existence", in *Religious Studies*, 14(1), 15-26.

Holmes, Rolston III (2005), "Genes, Brains, Minds: The Human Complex", in K. Bulkeley (ed), *Soul, Psyche, Brain: New Directions in the Study of Religion and Brain-Mind Science*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 10-35.

Housset, Emmanuel (2007), *La vocation de la personne: L'histoire du concept de personne de sa naissance augustinienne à sa redécouverte phénoménologique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Hume, David (1739), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: John Noon.

Hume, David (2007), "Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature", in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 133-145.

Joas, Hans (2013), *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Kant, Immanuel (1991), *The Metaphysics of Moral*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kauffman, Stuart A. (2008), *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion*, New York: Basic Books.

Kenny, Anthony (2004), *Aquinas on Mind*, London and New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Larson, Edward J., Larry Witham (1998), "Leading Scientists Still Reject God", in *Nature*, 394(2), 24-25.

LeDoux, Joseph (2002), *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are?*, New York: Penguin Books.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1962), *La pensée sauvage*, Paris: Plon.

Lewis, Staples C. (2007), *The Screwtape Letters*, New York: Harper-Collins.

Locke, John (1801), *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol. 2, Edinburgh: Mundell & Son.

Lund, David (2009), *Persons, Souls and Death: A Philosophical Investigation of an Afterlife*, Jefferson and London: McFarland.

Lund, David (2014), "Materialism, Dualism, and the Conscious Self", in A. Lavazza, H. Robinson (eds), *Contemporary Dualism: A Defense*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 56-78.

MacIntyre, Alasdair (2007), *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Philosophy*, 3th ed., Notre Dame (IN): University of Notre Dame Press.

Macklin, Ruth (2003), "Dignity is a Useless Concept", in *BMJ*, 327(7429), 1419-1420.

Marenbon, John (2003), *Boethius*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Mariani, Ezio (2003), *L'uomo, la cultura, l'anima. Riflessioni su questioni di antropologia e di teoria della conoscenza*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

Maritain, Jacques (1948), „Introduction", in Unesco (ed), *Human Rights. Comments and Interpretations* [Internet]. Paris, pp. i-ix. [cited 2015 Apr 11]. Available from: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001550/155042eb.pdf

Mashe, Mroy (1975), "Facts and Values: Is There a Naturalistic Fallacy?", in *Reason Papers. A Journal of Interdisciplinary Normative Studies*, no. 2, 29-39.

Masset, Pierre (1983), "Immortalité de l'âme, résurrection des corps. Approches philosophiques", in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 105, 321-344.

Mauron, Alex (2002), "Genomic Metaphysics", in *J Mol Biol*, 319(4), 957-962.

Mauss, Marcel (1938), "Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de «moi»", in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 68, 263-281.

McArdle, Patrick (2006), "Ecce Homo: Theological Perspectives on Personhood and the Passions", in *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 7, 1-12.

Milano, Andrea (1996), *Persona in teologia. Alle origini del significato di persona nel cristianesimo antico*, 2th ed., Roma: Dehoniane.

Mitchell, Ben C. et al. (2007), *Biotechnology and the Human Good*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Moore, Edward G. (1903), *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mouroux, Jean (1953), *Sens chrétien de l'homme*, Paris: Aubier.

Müller, Anselm W. (2011), "The Concept of Person in Bioethics", in S. Napier (ed), *Persons, Moral Worth, and Embryos. A Critical Analysis of Pro-Choice Arguments*, Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 85-100.

Müller, Werner A. (1996), "From the Aristotelian Soul to Genetic and Epigenetic Information: the Evolution of the Modern Concepts in Developmental Biology at the Turn of the Century", in *Int J Dev Biol*, 40(1), 21-26.

Murphy, James G. (2008), "Bioethics and Non-Psychological Views of Personhood", in *Teaching Ethics* 9(1), 55-72.

Nagel, Thomas (2012), *Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Nédoncelle, Maurice (1948), "Prosopon et persona dans l'antiquité classique. Essai de bilan linguistique", in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 22(1-2), 277-299.

Oaklander, Nathan L. (2001), "Personal Identity, Immortality and the Soul", in *Philo*, 4(2), 185-194.

Palazzani, Laura (1998), "I significati del concetto filosofico di persona e implicazioni nel dibattito bioetico e biogiuridico attuale sullo statuto dell'embrione umano", in Pontificia Academia Pro Vita (ed), *Identità e statuto dell'embrione*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, pp. 53-74.

Palazzani, Laura (2004), "Persona e bioetica", in G. Russo (ed), *Bioetica e sessuologia*, Leumann (Torino): Elledici, pp. 1356-1358.

Paolo VI (1985), "Costituzione pastorale «La Chiesa nel mondo contemporaneo»" (7 dicembre 1965), in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 1, *Documenti ufficiali del Concilio Vaticano II 1962-1965*, 13th ed., Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, pp. 770-965.

Parfit, Derek (1984), *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Paterson, Craig (2008), *Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: A Natural Law Ethics Approach*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Pizzorni, Reginaldo M. (2006), *Diritto etica e religione. Il fondamento metafisico del diritto secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino*, Bologna: Edizioni Studio Dominicano.

Possenti, Vittorio (2014), "Anima, mente, corpo e immortalità: la sfida del naturalismo", in *Roczniki Filozoficzne*, 62(2), 27-74.

Quinn, Patrick (2004), "Aquinas's Views on Mind and Soul: Echoes of Platonism", in *Verbum Analecta Neolatina*, 6(1), 85-93.

Ratzinger, Joseph (1990), "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology", in *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 17, 439-454.

Reichlin, Massimo (2008), "Definizione della persona e stato vegetativo permanente", in M. Galletti, S. Zullo (eds), *La vita prima della fine. Lo stato vegetativo tra etica, religione e diritto*, Firenze: Firenze University Press, pp. 7-23.

Reid, Thomas (2008), "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity", in J. Perry (ed), *Personal Identity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 113-118.

Ribas Alba, José M. (2011), *Persona: desde el derecho romano a la teología cristiana*, Granada: Editorial Comares.

Robb, Kevin (1986), "«Psyche» and «Logos» in the Fragments of Heraclitus: The Origins of the Concept of Soul", in *Monist*, 69(3), 315-351.

Rohde, Erwin (1925), *Psyche. The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks*, London: Trench, Trubner & Co., LTD.

Rovighi, Sofia V. (1976), *Elementi di filosofia*, vol. 3, Brescia: La Scuola.

Russo, Giovanni (2004), "Metabioetica", in L. Salvino, S. Privitera (eds), *Nuovo Dizionario di Bioetica*, Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, pp. 736-739.

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [SCDF] (1975), "Declaration on procured abortion" (18 Nov 1974), in *Linacre Q*, 42(2), 133-147.

Schroeder, Doris (2010), "One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Still Counting", in *Camb Q Health Ethics*, 19(1), 118-125.

Schwartz, Barry (2004), "The Tyranny of Choice", in *Sci Am*, 290(4), 70-75.

Sesboüé, Bernard (2002), "Dieu et le concept de personne" in *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 33(3), 321-350.

Shields, Christopher (2007), *Aristotle*, London and New York: Routledge.

Shostak, Stanley (2006), *The Evolution of Death. Why We Are Living Longer*, Albany (NY): State University of New York Press.

Skrbina, David (2014), "Dualism, Dual-Aspectism, and the Mind", in A. Lavazza, H. Robinson (eds), *Contemporary Dualism. A Defense*, New York and London: Routledge, pp. 220-244.

Spencer, Mark K. (2014), "The Personhood of the Separated Soul", in *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, 12(3), 863-912.

Tauber, Alfred I. (2009), *Science and the Quest for Meaning*, Waco (TX): Baylor University Pres.

Thiel, Marie-Jo (2010), "Human Dignity: Intrinsic or Relative Value?", in *J Int Bioethique*, 21(3), 51-62.

Van Hooft, Stan (2004), *Life, Death, and Subjectivity. Moral Sources in Bioethics*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.

Warnock, Mary (1983), „*In Vitro* Fertilization: The Ethical Issues" (II), in *Philos Q*, 33(132), 238-249.

Weisstub, David N., David C. Thomasma (2001), "Human Dignity, Vulnerability, Personhood", in D. C. Thomasma, D. N. Weisstub, C. Hervé (eds), *Personhood and Health Care*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 317-332.

White, Thomas I. (2007), *In Defense of Dolphins: The New Moral Frontier*, Malden (MA): Blackwell Publishing.

Williams, Bernard (2006), *The Sense of the Past. Essays in the History of Philosophy*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Wippel, John (2002), "Thomas Aquinas on the Separated Soul's Natural Knowledge", in J. McEvoy, M. Dunne (eds), *Thomas Aquinas. Approaches to Truth*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, pp. 114-140.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2001), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London and New York: Routledge.

Wojtyla, Karol (1978), "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man", in *Analecta Husserliana*, 7, 107-114.

Zaborowski, Holger (2010), *Robert Spaemann's Philosophy of the Human Person Nature, Freedom, and the Critique of Modernity*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Zimmerman, Dean (2011), "From Experience to Experiencer", in M. C. Baker, S. Goetz (eds), *The Soul Hypothesis: Investigation into Existence of the Soul*, New York: Continuum, pp. 168-196.

Zizioulas, John D. (1997), *Being as Communion*, Crestwood (NY): St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.