

Shining the Light of Faith and Philosophy on the Resurrection of Christ
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The aim of this essay is to examine the resurrection in the lights of faith and reason. God did not divide faith and reason, but their heterogeneous approaches to matters of faith often creates the illusion of conflict. Paul's letter to the Corinthians provides an illustration of that seeming conflict:

This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised, it will be immortal. When buried it is ugly and weak; when raised, it will be beautiful and strong. When buried, it is a physical body; when raised, it will be a spiritual body. There is, of course, a physical body, so there has to be a spiritual body.¹

We verify Paul's belief through a study of biblical texts and the examination of some philosophical assumptions concerning the nature, origin, and destiny of human life. The bible is not silent on these matters. The focal point is why we die. The text of *Genesis* traces the origin of death to the sin of Adam; "you must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day."² Adam listened to Eve and together they gave birth to sin "Then his evil desire conceives and gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."³ The text of *Genesis* affirms the consequence of sin, "You were made from soil, and you will become soil again."⁴

God did not intend sin, death, or the return to soil. When God created the world and all things in it, including human beings, "God looked at everything he had made, and he was very pleased."⁵ God saw that it was very good. Humans misused the gift of freedom, or misread the way in which God gave us dominion over the goods of the earth; our very own evil desire trapped us into the birth of sin and death. This is the worse possible thing that could happen to us. We turned creation upside down, mistakenly driven by evil intentions. The book of *Wisdom* forecasts our grim outlook; "It was the Devil's jealousy that brought death into the world, and those who belong to the Devil are the ones who will die."⁶ God created us good, but being contingent and susceptible to error, the root of the possibility of sin was in the world as the Devil's handy-work. Sin and death would frustrate God's plan for the goodness of creation by reversing the ground of goodness. We would die because of our evil choice. This brought no pleasure to God; "How painful it is to the Lord when one of his people dies."⁷

Hard times call for radical decisions. God would reverse the Devil's work through the death and resurrection of his beloved Son Jesus Christ; "For just as death come by means of a man, in the same way the rising from the dead comes from the means of a man. For just as all people die because of their union with Adam in the same way all will be raised to life because of their union with Christ."⁸ No less than the sacrifice of Christ's life is required to offset the Devil's work. The death of Christ heals the division brought on by the sin of humankind.

The death and resurrection of Christ opens the door to a fresh metaphysical process unfolding in history. Henceforth, the human race is on an eschatological pilgrimage towards the end of sin and death. The attraction of evil is strong; progress is slow. The allure of the materialist culture continues to attract a following. Miracles of nature impress us more than the forgiveness of sin. We look for cures rather than healing. Mark's story of the paralytic illustrates how the surface appearance of things deceives us. The crowd is asleep when Jesus forgives sin, but dazzled when Jesus cures the paralytic. Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins, not to cure disease!⁹

The death and resurrection of Christ is the most unselfish act of church history. Henceforth the order of creation would be different. Sin and death would cause the Kingdom of God to shift places, however. The Kingdom now arises at a place of reversal in the metaphysical ground of being. The death and resurrection of Christ ultimately annihilates the root of the possibility of sin and death. We have the beginnings of that promise in the text of John when Jesus says to Pilate "...if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No my kingdom does not belong here!"¹⁰

Since the resurrection of Christ ends the claim sin has on human nature, those individuals who follow Christ will lose death and find eternal life. Saint Paul shares this view with us; "...by means of the physical death of his Son, God has made you his friends, in order to bring you, holy, pure, and faultless, into his presence."¹¹

The divine promise is awesome. The miracle is not only that Christ should rise from the dead—though this fact is unfathomable in itself—but that Christ's infinite love and forgiveness reengages the process of salvation. The unimaginable selflessness of the divine action moves beyond logic; "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins."¹² The love God has for us establishes the root of the possibility of saying no to sin and loving one another.

God's love for us establishes the ground of salvation, namely the possibility of renouncing the Devil and his illusions. The possibility of eternal life exists because the death and resurrection of Christ defeats death; "The last enemy to be defeated will be death."¹³ The possibility of regaining the lost paradise exists because the reversal of the metaphysical ground of creation opens into the divine Kingdom. The death of Christ prepares the way not merely the absence of sin and death but to the removal of the ground of this possibility. The dead who rise anew in Christ will sin no more because of a hardening of their condition. Human death withdraws the possibility of sinning or not sinning. The individuals that die to sin in the death of Christ arise in the eternal presence of Christ and remain there forever.

The metaphysical structure of death presents a mirror image of this reality. The presence of the 'tree' provides a rich metaphor to express our human pilgrimage towards the resurrection. Isaiah uses the metaphor of the Jesse tree to express this view; "A shoot will spring forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots."¹⁴ The Jesse tree details a 4000-year history across the Old Testament from the story of creation in Genesis to Luke's account of the birth of the Messiah.¹⁵

I began using the Tree of life as a metaphor to explain my own views on the resurrection early in my career as professor of philosophy and religious studies at Cape Breton University; I published one paper in *The New Scholasticism*, and read another at a packed meeting of the Atlantic Philosophical Association (ARPA) in 1973¹⁶. In the early days, as now, the language of Christian metaphysics centers on the tree's unconcealment or Martin Heidegger's 'unverborgenheit'.

Assumptions

The worse thing that can happen to a Christian philosopher is act without faith. The second is to have unexamined beliefs. My faith assures me that God created the world and all things contained in it out of nothing. My reason seeks to probe the contents of the nothing out of which the creative act took place. Scientific reasoning announces that the big bang origin of the world occurred 13.7 billion years ago. Some scientists' claim that reason cannot move beyond the laws of matter to examine the nature of events beyond space and time. Their claim does not silence the psychological need of reason to explain things. Reason seeks to make sense of the nothing since it must contain the laws and patterns of an expanding and contracting universe. How does the universe know to obey these laws? The nothing expresses design. Science refuses this claim, and prefers to move into negative space-time or await the next range of observation and measurement.

Metaphysical reason examines the truths of faith, however. We know this much: the divine nothing exists at the place of our pre big bang existence. The sin of Adam and Eve cast us out of the realm of the 'eternal nothing' to a place of decomposition and dust in the temporal order of creation. The death and resurrection of Christ shifts us back into the eternal Kingdom of God.

The pre big bang nothing functions as a focal place in our Creation Story. Reason identifies it as a place of maximum intelligibility. The Ancient view of being's unconcealment underlies my metaphysical views of the role of the sacred nothing. The nothing out of which God creates the world and all things contained in it plays a central role in my philosophy of life and death. In Christian philosophy, human death appears to be a reversal in the primacy of existence, one that stands fallen creation on its head. I raise the question 'what is the nothing' but dare to venture beyond the other side of human death, while some philosophers like Martin Heidegger ask the question without providing an explicit answer. They suspect that the nature of death as such remains unknowable.

While we cannot understand death as such, we can explain it as a return—made possible by Christ—to the eternal nothing of divine intelligence that must have existed before creation. In philosophy, the explanation of a phenomenon traces its sufficient reason to the folds of an antecedent set of conditions. In the case of human death, the sufficient reason moves out of reason to the ultimate ground of the possibility of reason (creation). Being's unconcealment (the tree) provides the ground for the possibility of truth. Death is connected to being's

unconcealment. The metaphysical study of death avoids the absurdities raised by the epistemological inquiry into the nature of death as such while explaining the nature of the afterlife state and the obstinacy of the dead in heaven or hell.

The paper draws evidence from the lived life rather than science. The restlessness of the human condition needs an explanation. We act for an ultimate end; we search for the ultimate meaning of life by design. Being spiritual corresponds to a psychological tendency we express towards the attainment of an ultimate source of meaning—God, the Sacred, a Higher Power or transcendent source of unity. How do we explain the pervasive human desire to be with God—a desire expressed by all cultures since the beginning of civilization—if God does not exist or enter into relationship with us?

While I am not a Cartesian philosopher, and do not share Descartes' taste for reason as first indubitable truth, I value his use of analysis and synthesis as a method for resolving problems; he supposes that the solution to a problem is at hand and determines what conditions need to be in place to satisfy the exigencies of that solution. I examine my assumptions concerning the redemption through a study of being's (the tree) unconcealment. I suspect that the complementarities of reason and faith also play a significant role in Descartes' method, as they do here.

Why is the desire for personal immortality an integral aspect of human nature? Søren Kierkegaard finds his answer in the subjective desire itself rather than in objective proof. John Wild argues in a similar vein when he says that existential restlessness and the search for meaning suggests the existence of a personal God. The human condition moves us towards an ultimate unity that gives life meaning. Wild says "...the free action which lies at the heart of cultural, and even more of individual history, points to a transcendent unity, which is the ultimate, creative source of meaning and being, and the unity of the world."¹⁷ We need to justify our expressed craving for personal immortality, if God does not exist to grant it. We need to explain why the illusion of immortality is so deeply rooted in the human condition, and why the spiritual need to belong to something greater than ourselves exists, if nothing of the ego survives human death. I need to secure the sufficient reason of my loving tendency towards God somewhere, if not in the eternal concern for us expressed in the creative act and the redemption. The tree's unconcealment emerges as a focal place to frame fundamental beliefs concerning the ultimate end of human life and the possibility of eternal life.

The Argument

My admiration for the early Greek philosophers, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger laces the biblical assumptions I bring to the table. I can still see my professor of long ago, William Carlo; fill with excitement as he discussed Aquinas' view on the primacy of existence (*esse*) and the reducibility of essence to existence in Christian metaphysics. His point is that essence or nature arises at the place where the creative act of existence ends. In that event, human death is a return to God's creative act. The First Vatican Council (1869-1870), is very clear that God is the creator of all things:

If anyone does not confess that the world and all things which are contained in it, both spiritual and material, were produced, according to their whole substance, out of nothing by God; or holds that God did not create by his will free from all necessity, but as necessarily as he necessarily loves himself; or denies that the world was created for the glory of God: let him be anathema (Canon 5).¹⁸

The Canon expresses an infallible dogma of faith. Thomistic metaphysics assigns primacy to the existence of being and to the given fact that being is intelligible. The Thomistic concept being prepares the way for the idea of being. I use the 'tree's unconcealment', as a metaphor to examine some of the consequences of the creative act and being's primacy. The primacy of being also plays a central role in Heidegger's metaphysics. He states that the existence of truth relates to the word *alêtheia*, which he translates as 'unconcealment' or 'disclosure.' Being's unconcealment presences so that truth can fly freely from the being of things. The clearing in being, namely the nothing or the place where physical things are not, makes presencing possible and therefore sends us on an errand to discover the truth of being. (It seems possible to suggest that the human body serves to individuate the human soul in the afterlife state of existence).

Heidegger rescues the meaning of being from the early Greek thinkers. He lectures extensively on Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus during his teaching career at Freiburg University (1915-1923, and 1928-1945). The influence of Aristotle's metaphysics on his career is apparent. Heidegger uses convoluted descriptions to convey the early Greek experience of being as presencing. He quotes with approval Parmenides' poem *On Nature*. In the first part of that poem 'The Way of Truth' Parmenides expresses his understanding of being through the

analysis of the principle of identity (the distinction between what is and what is not). According to Heidegger, the clearing makes presencing possible by marking a distinction between where the tree is and where it is not. Each state is in relationship to the other, as we are to death and Christ is to eternal life. The clearing calls us forth to uncover the truth of being. The nothing envelops the tree and allows the movement of speculative thought to take place.¹⁹ The early Greek thinkers focused on the truth of being. In that spirit, we can distinguish between the beginnings of cosmos through the big bang and the place where matter is not (the divine nothing). However, being's unconcealment is not given at once. Science needs time to catch up to faith. The discovery of truth is an ongoing process. This launches a debate that continues today on the connection between thought, words, and things. The history of metaphysics, according to Heidegger, reveals a history of the ways in which we frame and distort being.

The truth of death arises out of the nothing that envelops the unconcealment of being. The following passage is taken from one of my published books (2006) to illustrate the metaphysical role of being's unconcealment;²⁰

The love of God is manifest in being's unconcealment. The tree in my back yard speaks to me. It sends me on an errand to discover the truth about itself. I take my tools with me wherever I go; the tools of a philosopher, theologian, scientist, and artist help me carve an idea of the tree. The philosopher makes distinctions, defines terms, examines assumptions, reduces the complex to the simple, maintains internal consistency, and asks why there is something rather than nothing? The theologian thinks of the tree's outstretched arms reaching towards God. The scientist talks about carbon atoms, and the artist writes about the tree's beauty in iambic pentameters. We write about these truths in learned journals and meet to talk about them in learned societies. The tree chuckles as we distort the meaning of being. The tree laughs aloud when it hears the mind flapping over the merits of a rationalist who would be his own tree. The tree groans as empiricism reduces it to the sensate world. [...] Immanuel Kant's *a priori* counters Hume's skepticism and saves the tree from the pulp mill. The tree groans and sobs because no one is listening. Why not let me speak for myself, says the tree? And the phenomenologist agrees. Back to the tree says Edmund Husserl, back to the tree before all this mind flapping distorted the nature of the organic errand. We set up

an altar to the tree. We make the intelligibility of the tree a gift from God—a religious reconnection. (77)

The existence of a world outside consciousness is indemonstrable. God invites us to become aware that we stand in the presence of mystery (the indemonstrable world.) The existence of the world is an invitation to enter into relationship with God. The tree sends us on a metaphysical pilgrimage towards God.

A danger of going too far exists in the use of metaphors, of doing for the tree what Descartes did for the thinking thing. We run the risk of raising the tree's primacy to a place it cannot defend. The tree is not conscious, though it secures the ground for the possibility of consciousness. Consciousness cannot function without its object. We tell the tree that we are co-creators of errands. We ask it to swallow the same pill Descartes had to swallow. We remind the tree that we are in communion with it. The tree sends no errand in the absence of conscious, intelligent runners. We establish a partnership between mind and things. The partnership values the correlates of truth; the one subjective, and the other objective. This is what Heidegger made known when he said that the thing in itself is not being, nor is it consciousness, but a mode of existence superimposed upon the two in such a way as to make the knowledge encounter possible. God created trees and human beings to pursue the divine image together. Trees do it naturally. We do it through faith, reason, will, and emotion. I select my agenda and prioritize my errands. I have a history, and horizon; a bag full of environmental, social, psychological ways of looking at my instructions. I read my tree instructions as a person of faith, philosopher, theologian, scientist, and artist. The tree sends me on an errand to make sense of sin, death, forgiveness, and eternal life.

Reasoning is a process of visiting being and running errands to discover truth. In the context of creation, human death arises when the tree's unconcealment ceases. Human death does not arise because of something consciousness does or fails to do. It arises because of a removal of ground in the possibility of doing and not doing. In ordinary language, we speak about death as being the loss of consciousness. I have no problems with this from the point of view of epistemology, though it does lead to some confusions and absurdities if we use epistemology to examine the (metaphysical) nature of death as such. For instance, if death is the absence of activity and feelings, are we going to ask how it feels not to feel or what we do when we do nothing? Paul Edwards (1969) points out the absurdity of that sort of inquiry.²¹ The shift towards

metaphysics and being's unconcealment avoids that absurdity, however. It allows us to come face to face with the full consequences of the primacy of *existence* by enabling a movement out of reason towards the ground of reason—a ground given in the creative act. Human death occasions a reversal in being's unconcealment as it shifts out of the temporal order to unfold into full disclosure in the meta-space-time ground of being (God's eternal existence). This explains how the forgiveness of sin ends death by returning those who die in Christ to the eternal now of God. If we are returned to eternal life, being's unconcealment must emerge to full disclosure in the spontaneous duration of the afterlife state to explain the obstinacy of the dead. This gives the trees of creation (the world and all things contained in it) a completely new dimension.

The argument becomes interesting at this point. Some philosophers will not make the leap to the other side of death. Heidegger, for instance, will not go there because he thinks that the nature of death as such is unknowable. Still the question 'what happens to being's unconcealment at human death' remains unanswered. The dialogue ends from the point of view of epistemology but continues from the point of view of metaphysics. How can the primacy of being end? We are necessarily connected to being's unconcealment. We are the output of God's creative act and bear the mark of an entity coming out of the nothing. The nothing is our generic home; it characterizes us. We trace our temporal beginning to being but we trace our eternal origin to the creative act and the nothing that envelops being. Since death is the consequence of sin, the death of death must be the consequence of forgiveness. It seems to me that the redemption changes the objective as well as the subjective correlates of consciousness. The unitary character of knowledge (the thing-in-itself) suggests as much. Reason goes where faith points. We know how human death changes us, but how does it change being? It does not change being from the epistemological point of view. We look to the metaphysical perspective for an explanation: the death of a human being diminishes being's unconcealment as well as the human race! Contrarians express their view in dualistic, non-phenomenological language, as if human death and human life were unrelated. This is in flat contradiction to our divine origins, the ways of human reason, and the principle of identity. It flatly contradicts Heidegger's phenomenological point of view. The final insult is to suggest that God was mistaken for creating the world and all things contained in it and that the death and resurrection of Christ changes nothing.

The matter is simple for faith but complex for reason. Paul Tillich affirms the existence of an afterlife state though he professes to know nothing about its nature.²² Perhaps Tillich's 'agnostic'

explanation is epistemological rather than metaphysical though the logic of seeing something without venturing an explanation of what we see eludes me. The difference between Tillich and Heidegger is that the former seems to cross over into the afterlife state to label it unknowable whereas Heidegger refuses to move towards the other face of being's unconcealment. The metaphor of the tree's unconcealment and our dialogue in being opens the possibility of looking at death from two sides. This way of looking at nature is compatible with Mi'kmaq culture's 'two-eyed seeing' and the discovery of spirituality in the natural environment, as well as with the Eastern belief in reincarnation.

The suggestion that human death arises as the removal of ground in which being presents itself to consciousness signals an important distinction between two senses of nothing—nothing as the negation of presence and nothing as the removal of ground in which the possibility of negating presence arises. Heidegger's 'nothing' marks the place where being is not. Death, he says in *Being and Time* is 'Dasein's ownmost possibility—non relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped.'²³ Further, death presents 'as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all.'²⁴ In brief, Heidegger defines death as being 'the utmost possibility of impossibility'. This is because he refuses to discuss the essence of death and cross over into the other side of presencing. The nothing surrounding things, according to Heidegger, marks the place where being ends. It functions as a clearing for being. This presents the nothing as impossibility, that is, it cannot exist in the absence of being. The death that returns to God functions as the utmost possibility of possibility. In Christian belief, God fills the nothing that surrounds being because God creates out of it. Human death is a return to the divine nothing. In this sense, death as such is a reversal in the ground of the possibility of knowing being. The dead emerge in the full disclosure of being's unconcealment in the afterlife state of human death. This view of death and the nothing has some useful applications. For instance, it lends itself to a study of the nature of the silence found in biblical texts from Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Job.²⁵ The Lord does not appear to Elijah in wind, earthquake, or fire but in the silence, that follows these events. This place is not the absence of these events since negation makes sense in relation to an anterior presence, (Heidegger's nothing) which is something. The divine silence arises at the place of the removal of the ground of the possibility of negation (the creative nothing). Elijah stands in the sacred presence of the Lord. The dead, it seems to me, meet the Lord in that same sacred space—a place bordered by nothingness where the root of the possibility of presence and creation exists.

I believe in Heaven and Hell. I take these states to refer to the presence and absence of God, respectively. However, I wonder why the dead who are in hell fail to repent, given that the eternal privation of God is painful. For that matter, I wonder why the dead in Heaven cannot sin, given the weakness of human beings. What role does being's unconcealment play in the state or condition of the dead? If it is the case that the dead are obstinate, that is, if they are irreversibly locked into a condition of Heaven and Hell forever, we must look to see why this is the case. Aquinas says that the will of the Demons is obstinate in evil.²⁶ We suppose that the condition of the Blessed is obstinate in good. This is due to their condition or nature, he says, as is the case of humans who are damned.²⁷ Aquinas says that the damned are able to make use of the knowledge they had in this world. Moral habit persists in the soul of the dead; '...some powers belong to the soul alone as their subject; as the intellect and will. These powers must remain in the soul after the destruction of the body.'²⁸ Since moral habits persist in the soul of the dead, it must be the case that death is an occasion for data input and a final decision to side with God or the fallen angels. In death, the faithful make a final decision to side with the ways of Christ. Our moral habits must predispose us to decide one way rather than the other in the full-intuited disclosure of being's unconcealment. How else can we explain the obstinacy of the dead? The dead do not repent because they lack no data. We do not have all the data required to justify obstinacy while we are in this world. Human death, then, must move us out of the temporal into the eternal presencing of God. Death as such moves into the realm of the divine nothing. Death, then, must be an occasion for data input. Being and consciousness continue to function as a unit. At human death, being's unconcealment must therefore arise anew in full unconcealment in duration above time. In sum, the final decision to side with God or the fallen angels takes place in the light of our moral habits and being's emergence to absolute unconcealment.²⁹

This belief in the resurrection and forgiveness of the dead depends on a dynamic view of human nature and the continuity of the moral habits developed in this life into the next world. The problem of personal identity—how that can be me as disembodied entity in the afterlife—demands full explanation. To accomplish this transition I distinguish between being human and becoming persons. I developed a person-making process in the nineties that continues to be useful to-day. I tested the application of the concept in applied ethics (client rights) environmental ethics (the rights of the environment), and nursing theory (spirituality) and hospice palliative care.³⁰ It functions as a structure to house my values, attitudes, and beliefs about the meaning of life. The structure of being a person is critical to this paper since my

argument concerning personal identity in the next world depends on it. If the afterlife state exists as faith affirms, and if, by the will of God, and the death and resurrection of Christ, I exist in the redeemed state of forgiveness in the divine nothing of my pre big bang existence, then, I need to examine how that can be me in the absence of my physical body. Aquinas' view of human death as the separation of the soul from the body raises the problem of dualism and personal identity. Therefore, we need to move beyond it. While some thinkers such as Paul Edwards claim that the existence of an afterlife state is a non-starter without dualism—the problem is that dualism and the continued existence of the self as a disembodied ego in the afterlife state generates a problem with personal identity. My body is an essential part of what makes me who I am. How can that be me in the afterlife state without my body? The death of Christ redeemed Paul and the apostles, but have they been waiting 2000 years for a body? How can the dead act without a body? Aquinas' belief in the resurrection of the body appears to anticipate the problem of the disembodied self but the fact remains that until body and soul rejoin, the dead present as incomplete persons. They are less than personal. The reducibility of matter to soul solves that problem, but I need to explain how this works. In my view, what counts about individuation and personal identity is *the principle of embodiment*, not the actual quantity, size, extension or form of the body. The soul separates from the body as an embodied soul that is, marked by the individuation of a well-defined material, interpersonal, and introspective existence. The ongoing nature of the person-making process justifies the belief in personal immortality. We need to include the formative role of family, and friends, as well as the activities of an internal self, and the principle of embodiment to safeguard personal identity in the afterlife state of existence.

This is how a Christian philosopher might explain personal identity in the afterlife state of redeemed existence: A person, it seems to me, is the output of relationships taking place at three fundamental levels of operation. This means that the abstract self does not exist outside relationships. There is no “I”, “self”, “ego” or “subject” of experience outside these associations. Creating associations creates the self. The nature of personal identity is dependent on them. The associations that define me on this side of being's unconcealment must persist in the afterlife state of existence to safeguard my personal identity. Some associations such as genetic makeup and socio-political environment shape us at birth whereas we freely choose other associations as we mature.

God the Father creates the world and all things contained in it. The first and most basic association that characterizes us is that we are the product of an environment. A part of me is

matter arising out of matter. Geography of place and a DNA profile characterize me. I am the product of chemical activities taking place in my mother's uterus forcing me to act out a part predetermined by my zygotic configuration. The term I use to identify this first formative line of becoming persons is 'the environmental self'. This term appears to be more inclusive than the 'material, chemical, or embodied self,' though I am carbon atoms along with other carbon atoms. My environmental self includes a physical body as well as a dependence on nature. I am not outside of nature looking at nature but I am an integral part of my environment. I am a physical being, matter and energy, along with other extended things in the world sharing with them the challenges of survival. Extension comes from extension; human energy is the output of cosmic energy. Anything that affects my environmental connection defines me. When I act, the whole of me acts. I am a dynamic extended unity of associations. Persons resist destruction by maintaining the harmonious relationships of all their parts. The tree in my backyard is not an entity that exists outside of me. It bears my footprint; we breathe a common air. Dendrochronology—the study of tree rings—reveals that trees incorporate growth input from their local environment. Trees from toxic environments capture chemical signatures. These tree layers, along with chemical signatures from the whole of my environment define me in turn; they fill me with genes and chromosomes that predispose me towards illness and health. The memories of growing up in this or that town, of being here or there are an integral part of who I am though persona identity is not reducible to memory states. I continue to be me in their absence. The environmental focus is more than a geographical expression of extension. The environmental self includes my body, my diet, my brain, my external senses, my central nervous system, and the tree in my backyard. I am bladder and kidneys, heart and lungs, with blue or brown eyes, tall or short, fat or thin, brown or white, in this or that place, eating this or that food, in this or that climate, young and old, and to change any of these things is to change who I am. The principle of quantity marks the whole of me. My body obeys the laws of physics that every organism follows. In F. T. Capra's systems theory (1992) the properties of the part arise out of the dynamics of the whole.³¹ Action and reaction generate equal and opposite forms of energy. I enter life, convert nutrient into energy, my cells add and divide and I age, die, and something of me returns to the environment. This footprint individuates me in the afterlife state of existence because in this life it shapes my soul and becomes an integral part of my personal identity.

My brain and the contents of consciousness is affected by chemicals, diet, all matters of environmental factors, but persons exhibit behaviors that cannot be explained by the

environmental self-alone. While I am physical, I can do things that elude other physical things. I can pray and I can sin. I can violate the laws of the irreversibility of space and time. I entertain thoughts that are irreducible to the activities going on in my brain. The proof that something else is going on in us is that we remain unique in spite of our similarities. All persons have a brain, but we are not equally personal. Part of the explanation lies in two other streams of associations. The next stage of growth is the social self.

The bond we share with the environment grows more intimate as we recognize that being a person includes the perspective of a social self. God the Son creates the possibility of loving others. A person is the output of a social network comprised of parent(s), sibling(s), relatives, friends, society-at-large, animals and other living things, including trees. Initially the social network shapes my social nature. I cannot choose my parents or siblings, though later in life I can choose my friends. As I mature, I become more aggressive in defining myself as I choose where to live and with whom to associate. However, I do not exist outside social relationships. The social self is the product of associations taking place in relationship with all living things. The first line of influence on the social-self is the family environment as mother and/or father teach us about love and caring as they strive to meet our basic needs for food and warmth. The social net grows larger as we learn how to interact with significant others; family, friends, people at large, and the whole of the biotic community—animals and plants. Persons live side-by-side with the biotic community. We share life with all other living things, eating and being eaten, living, and dying. We inhale and exhale the same air, drink the same water, and walk, swim, fly or climb on common ground. No person exists in the absence of a social face.

I have found two basic contrasting ways to describe the social self—the way of Christ and the way of the Devil; one looks to the other through the eyes of love (Gabriel Marcel) to form relationships that endure beyond the grave, while the other arms the social self with contempt for others (Jean-Paul Sartre) and (fortunately) ends at death. Vincent Cradeau exclaims in the closing lines of Sartre's one act play *No Exit* (1945) "Hell is just—other people."³² That discovery reveals much about Sartre's atheistic existentialism, though it misrepresents his humanism. Sartre as humanist is on the side of the angels. Individuals design their ethical standards through freely chosen acts. In that process, according to Sartre, we objectify other persons, that is, we create ourselves by distancing ourselves from others and locking them into states of being. We treat them as environmental associations. Sartre suggests we work together to overcome the problem of scarcity, however. This is his light side.

Marcel's social self, on the other hand, does not appear to have a dark side as he develops as an intentionality of loving subjects³³. He is a Christian philosopher. This social self survives personal death. The phenomenon of love raises human relationships from the level of subject-object to forms of subjectivity. The other becomes an extension of the self. Marcel claims that the relationship we have with others is analogous to our own embodiment. I am my body (as opposed to I have a body) means that the other is an extension of me rather than an object to be exploited. In his works, the social claims of denial, infidelity, unavailability, exploitation and despair give way to a philosophy of love and availability, fidelity and God. Where there is God, there is hope. Moreover, hope is the fundamental stuff of life. *The God that Marcel invokes exists in social relationships*. Christ is present in the caring of the other. Human grief is not an illness; it is a human condition; a broken social-self relationship that never completely heals over, though it leads to our experience of the afterlife state of the deceased. I can love others while others love and nurture me in turn. This is in stark contrast to Sartre's claim that others exploit and disempower me. In Christian philosophy, the death of lovers raises relationships to a place of ongoing love in duration above time. Your death is simultaneously a temporal loss and the beginning of our eternal communion. The story of our temporal history does not heal the emptiness of death until love raises our relationship into duration above time. Love sculpts the soul into the image of God. Authentic love exists beyond the stream of environmental associations as the death of lovers continues into immortality.

The love that parents freely give us serves as a model for us to emulate as we learn that we too can move out of our fundamental selfishness to care for others. The social self continues to develop over a lifetime of interactions with people worldwide. We learn and develop lessons of kindness; we learn how to be compassionate, and how to be of service to others. We learn to empathize with the pain of the other, as Christ teaches. The nurse in relationship with cancer patients, for instance, may or may not have a personal experience of cancer but she/he can be in touch with her own pain and use that experience as a bridge to the suffering of the other. We learn about resonance, and identification; availability and fidelity, and what Marcel describes as a process of participation. We also learn about hate, resentment, insecurities, jealousy, and other negative emotions. However, the choice to use negative or positive emotions as a gateway to the other is ours alone. We build a better world as we exchange hate for love, unavailability for availability, and disinterest for compassion in all our encounters with other persons. The social self, not unlike the environmental self, engages persons in a lifelong process of becoming

progressively more personal. Each day, each hour, each instant of time offers an opportunity to empower other persons—to love others, to be of service to others, as we share with them the responsibility of civilization, and the construction of a better world (historicity). A person is a dynamic growing human being in action, not a static walled in self. I can use the experiences of the social self to empower or to disempower others, to curse the darkness or to light a candle, as the saying goes. This dynamic social-self forms moral habits that mold the soul into the image and likeness of God.

The third string of associations that characterizes being a person is the internal self. The Holy Spirit—the third personality of God—teaches me wisdom. I am the output of memories, dreams, and thoughts, conscious and unconscious processes taking place in the interior self. No pure “I” of experience exists. I am not an interior self that reflects on memories and dreams, but I am that very being now dreaming, now remembering and imagining, thinking and willing, sensing and perceiving as I act and react to my environment, and other persons. These experiences accompany the mysterious gift of reflexive awareness as I double back on the awareness of relationships to become aware of myself as a being in relationships, to form, institute and build dynamic streams of associations in the person-making likeness of the divine. The internal self is but one of three streams of person-making associations. The internal stream exists within psyche as a place to receive, catalogue and generate fresh associations. It provides the glue that fuses the choice of ongoing associations into a person-making process. This is where my decision to empower (Marcel) or disempower (Sartre) other persons exists. This is the place of soul making. The environmental streams registers moral habits in the neural tracts it forms in my brain. The social self shapes my soul into a mirror of the love I have for others, but the internal self gives the command to follow the Blessed Trinity into eternal life. Developing virtues is a lifetime job.

Chronologically, the internal self places third in the stream of person-making associations because it arises after the fact of an environmental beginning and social stream of relationships—the nature-nurture dimension of becoming persons. The environmental stream arises first because it generates a genetic pathway to the central self. No self-concept exists without the brain. The social arm of the person-making process simultaneously provides the emotional content to our behavioral responses to other persons. The central self fine-tunes emotional responses. We learn to institute and vary the stream of relationships established at the interpersonal level of existence.

A person cannot think without a brain. The brain does not tell the whole story, however. Persons also need other persons and the internal self to love God.

Some philosophers appeal to the existence of an intangible element in the central sense others do not. My inclination and indeed fundamental belief is that the human mind provides evidence of the existence of the sacred within each individual. Given that we act as dynamic unit of all the streams of associations that characterize the process of becoming truly personal, it follows that each person is a spark of the divine-at-work-in-the-world. In my opinion, this is how we align the likeness of God (Christ) within us to move towards the image of God.³⁴ This suggestion fits what we know about the human mind, love and compassion but a full grasp of the nature of the internal self is elusive on this side of death for how can we use mind to understand mind; the whole idea of the mind explaining itself is a logical contradiction! This realization places me in the presence of mystery within my own person-making associations.

Thomistic philosophy appeals to the ‘spiritual intellect’ to explain the elusive character of mind. The mind is infinite in its hunger for truth. We are restless seekers of meaning; no finite series of goods completely satisfies us. The spiritual intellect manifests a psychological tendency towards God, or a need to belong to something greater than it does because only God can satisfy our craving for ultimate meaning. The desire to see God does not come from person-making associations, although the structure of persons reveals a tendency to search for the presence of the eternal in the temporal. This speaks volumes about our species. What is the origin of the drive towards God? Since persons are the output of finite associations, the need to see God suggests the presence of a spiritual intellect designed by God in us. In logic, the finite brain cannot explain a tendency towards the infinite. The mechanism that triggers our addiction to God must be the presence of the divine within the human psyche. This view confirms the belief expressed in the book of *Genesis* that God made us in his image and likeness.³⁵ This belief provides the ontological foundation for the possibility of human love in this world as well as in the afterlife. The central self stands us in the presence of mystery and the gift of personal existence.

The central self is active as well as passive. We process the associations generated in the three streams of person-making relationships, while raising them to new heights as we institute and vary fresh relationships towards the attainment of our ultimate end. Our environmental associations are relative to culture, but each person joins others in a common search for the transcendent. This is the meaning of being religious. We are not equally personal because the

person-making process is the outcome of individual history and choices. We aspire to transcendence together as we share the responsibility of civilization. Unfortunately, we are not always tolerant of others and their cultural differences. The irony of world religions is that a common thirst for the presence of the transcendent, expressed in the language of love, should incite persons to war against each other. Something about the inner self remains a paradox. The irony lies in the fact that the defense of the sacred often misses the existence of the sacred in all individuals.

The presences of all the streams of person-making associations we generate in this life must accompany us into the afterlife to preserve personal identity. While Aquinas argued that moral habits remain in the separated soul—habits formed out of associations generated in the internal sense—it seems possible to include the environmental and social associations in his typology since they also temper the soul’s moral character. The circumstances of action play a larger role in neural development than Aquinas imagined. For this reason, I include the environmental and social self as distinct categories of the person-making process. Nevertheless, the soul’s immortality is not at an end because of its character-building journey. I have argued in *Persons and Immortality*³⁶ that the immortal soul must carry this imprint into the afterlife state to preserve personal identity.

Aquinas focuses on the immaterial character of the soul to support his belief in immortality, however. Aquinas says that the human soul or life principle is immaterial. It is not composed of parts and therefore it is irreducible to parts at human death. The view of a fully individuated soul does not detract from the belief in immortality but adds to this belief a more complete sense of being personal. This reasoning explains what we already know through faith, namely the mystery of death; those who die in Christ arise as persons in Christ. God creates us in God’s image and likeness. Sin leads to human death. The death and resurrection of Christ redeems us from death. On occasion of death, persons that die in Christ arise to eternal life.

Jacques Maritain argues that the self that is currently thinking, immersed in the fire of knowledge, cannot think of itself as not thinking, that is, at one point not being. He says that I must have existed in God before receiving my temporal beginning.³⁷ The argument suggests that we cannot think of ourselves as coming to an end. The death and resurrection of Christ redeems us from the wages of sin. The person-making process details the metaphysical ground of the belief in the existence of the enduring self.

What ordinary language can we use to describe the fully individuated or ‘personal soul’ in the afterlife state, given its immaterial character? The first is that God created the human soul out of nothing. We are contingent beings with a temporal beginning. It seems possible to suggest that matter stands in relation to the soul as Heidegger’s (Parmenides) non-being to being. Matter is the opposite of the immaterial. It functions as a clearing for the presencing of the immaterial. Matter draws attention to non-matter by sending us on an errand to discover the truth that lies within it to make the presencing of the soul possible. The soul arises where matter ends. Presencing is disclosed or unconcealed through the medium of space and time on this side of being’s unconcealment. Presencing arises to total unconcealment of the soul in duration above time on the other side of being’s unconcealment. This explains the obstinacy of the dead. The soul’s finite nature now individuated by matter arises at the place where matter ends, surrounded by nothingness. In the material world, it seems possible to suggest that essence arises at the place where existence ends. That metaphor extends to the soul as the first principle of existence. William Carlo’s work (1966) on the ultimate reducibility of essence to existence in existential metaphysics provides a vocabulary we can use to shed light on the relationship between body and soul (prime matter and substantial form). He says we can interpret substantial change as a shift in one essential mode of existence to another. Matter functions as the intrinsic limitation of existence; “it is not *that which* limits *esse*, it is *the limitation of esse*; it is not *that which* receives, determines and specifies *esse*, it is the very *specification itself* of existence.”³⁸ This view, I think, sheds light on the nature of the individuated risen soul. The person-making associations of this life prepare the risen soul’s moral character in the afterlife. Personal identity arises at the place of the nothing or presencing that surrounds the soul. This view occasions a shift in focus from the place where matter ends in this life to individuate soul, to a place in the afterlife where the finite soul is marked by the individuation of temporal existence. This is to explain how the disembodied soul maintains personal identity.

The explanation of how the disembodied soul maintains personal identity is incomplete without mention of John Hick’s soul-making adventure into the development of character. This seminal work (1977) suggests that soul making is possible because of the ills and sufferings of this world. It provides an answer to a fundamental problem in theodicy, namely, why an all-loving and all-powerful God allows the suffering of innocent victims. The problem, first formulated by Epicurus presents itself as a dilemma; “If God is perfectly good, He must want to abolish all evil; if He is unlimitedly powerful, He must be able to abolish all evil: but evil exists,

therefore either God is not perfectly good or He is not unlimitedly powerful.”³⁹ My first response is that God promises to abolish the consequence of sin and death for the followers of Christ. Hick’s response moves along that same theme. He claims that character building could not take place in a perfect world. Soul making arises as the outcome of our free choices in the face of evil and suffering as we develop moral habits that accompany us into the afterlife. Moral character provides an instance of a developed internal sense, of a place surrounding the human body where the soul develops moral habits.

While the language of Heidegger and Hick is reinterpreted to explain the risen soul as individuated by the environmental self (matter) and the internal self (character), respectively, the genealogy of personal identity in the afterlife state is incomplete without mention of the role Marcel assigns to the ‘social self.’ A person is a being in loving relationships with other persons, and God. God makes us in His image and likeness. Therefore, human death raises these relationships to a new beginning in duration above time. The survivor experiences the afterlife state while the deceased continues to experience the survivor through God. This reflection on human death provides renewed evidence for the experience of the eternal in this life.

Conclusion

Our faith promises us eternal life if we follow the loving ways of Christ. Reason explains how this might work. The speculative character of the foregoing discussion arises because of the abstract nature of the afterlife state of being. Yet the question about the existence of life after death is the most practical of issues, especially if that state is unending. The continuity between both sides of death emerges as the central feature of a Christian life. While Heidegger does not discuss the essence of death, his metaphysics provides a foundation for doing so, especially in the light of death as moment of final decision as argued here and by R.P. Glorieux, S. Boros, and J. Peiper. Heidegger’s metaphysics introduces being’s unconcealment from a temporal perspective. The eternal dimension of life transform that vision into being’s full unconcealment, given the intentionality of consciousness! How else can we explain the obstinacy of the demons if not through the view of death as a final occasion for data input? To recast what Epicurus said about death in a fresh setting, we who are not yet dead affirm the existence of an afterlife state because of faith, but also because of the ways of human reason. The psychological need to belong to something greater than ourselves, the search for ultimate meaning, and the desire for

personal immortality suggest that death is a beginning rather than an end. When death comes to us, the presence of the eternal in the temporal dimension of human existence rises to full unconcealment in the afterlife state of being.

If the unexamined life is not worth living, and if faith is part of the lived life, then surely we have the obligation to examine matters of faith. The view of being's unconcealment provides a gateway to the analyses of reason and the discovery of the eternal in the temporal scheme of things. The fact that many share my desire for personal immortality and my belief in the teachings of Christ and the Apostle's Creed suggests that the belief is not wrong. I hope that others will find the complementarities of faith and reason useful to the study of sin, death, and the resurrection.

Addenda

The metaphysics of being's unconcealment provides insight into the epistemology of the transfiguration. We imagine that being's emergence to absolute unconcealment provides the grounds for a paradigm shift in which the concept as process of knowledge and of the idea as the term of knowledge trade places. This Copernican Kantian reversal in the geography of knowledge allows us to suppose that intuition will replace discursive reasoning in the next life. The knowledge and love of the Lord will take place spontaneously. While Biblical texts do not discuss this aspect of human death, it seems possible to suggest that the conceptual primacy of existence gives way to the primacy of loving action in human death. Idealist philosophers like Berkeley, Spinoza and Leibnitz are visionaries or mystics for mistaking the afterlife state for the natural world. In my view, the soul armed with a final and thorough intuition of being produces a brilliant idea that resonates throughout the body and lights up the world. The object of knowledge becomes the subject of knowledge in an electrifying rush of energy that illuminates the whole soul and lights up the body. The body glows as if struck by divine lightning. This view provides a metaphysical verification of what sacred texts say about the transfiguration of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.⁴⁰

The study of eschatology is fascinating and daunting. How can we imagine the meaning of the beatific vision? Meditating on Christ as human as well as divine prepares the way, however. Christ is one of us. The relationships taking place in the Blessed Trinity between the love of the Father for the Son and the expression of this love in the Holy Spirit as seen through the eyes of Christ as personal prepares us for what lies ahead. The likeness of Christ's human nature in us provides the loving foundation we require to continue to move towards the full expression of the divine image in eternal life. The main play is the subjective leap into the arms of Christ. Reason provides grounds to legitimate the leap, but in the end, God's love for us secures the possibility of that leap.

Reason and faith cannot be in conflict since they both come from God. At the end of the day, if reason fails to justify religious beliefs, then, reasoning is flawed. It seems possible to conclude that in this instance they are complementary.

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Endnotes

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

² Genesis 2:17.

³ James 1:15.

⁴ Genesis 3:19.

⁵ Genesis 1:31.

⁶ Wisdom 2:24.

⁷ Psalm 116:15.

⁸ 1 Corinthian 15:21-22.

⁹ Jesus Came Healing and Curing. *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*. Vol 11, number 18, (July 4, 2010).

¹⁰ John 18:36.

¹¹ Colossians 1:22.

¹² 1 John 4:7-10.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:26.

¹⁴ Isaiah 11:1.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:1-23; Luke 2:1-20.

¹⁶ Ken Bryson, "Being and Human Death," *The New Scholasticism*, XLV111, 3 (summer 1974): 343-350. I read an earlier draft of that paper at a meeting of the Atlantic Philosophical Congress Association, University of New Brunswick, Canada, (1973).

¹⁷ John Daniel Wild, *Existence and the World of Freedom*. Englewoods Cliff N.J.: Prentice-Hall (1963) 208.

¹⁸ Pope Pius IX 'On God the creator of all things' *First Vatican Council* (1869-70) 1. Canon 5.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger discusses the nature of the nothing in his (July 24, 1929) lecture *What is Metaphysics?* (trans. David Ferrell Krell).

²⁰ Constantine Ponomareff and Ken Bryson *The Curve of the Sacred: An Exploration of Human Spirituality*. VIBS vol 178. Amsterdam-New York NY: Editions Rodopi B.V. (2006) 77-78.

²¹ Paul Edwards "Existentialism and Death: A Review of Some Absurdities and Confusions." *Philosophy, Science and Method* eds. Morgenbesser, Suppes, and White. New York: St Martin's Press (1969) 473-505.

²² See Paul Tillich *The Shaking of the Foundations*. New York: Scribner (1948) 169-173, and *The Courage to Be*. London: Collins (1967).

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* trans. J. MacQuarrie and J. Robinson. New York and Evanston: Harper and Row Publishers (1962) 303.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁵ Ken Bryson "Silence and Hebrew Meditation." *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*. (25 January, 2009). I also examine the nature of the 'nothing' in an earlier paper, "The Metaphysical Road to God." *Quodlibet Online Journal of Theology and Philosophy*. vol 7, number 2: April-June (2005).

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1. q.64, a.2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Suppl. q. 98, aa. 1,3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1. q. 77, a.8.

²⁹ I developed this theme in *Flowers and Death*. York University: University Press of Canada (1985) Third Edition Captus Press (1995). The belief that death is the moment of final decision is expressed by several authors including R. P. Glorieux, "Endurcissement final et grâce dernières" *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, vol. 10, (December 1932); Ladislaus Boros S.J. *The Moment of Truth*. London: Burns and Oates (1965), and *The Mystery of Death* New York: Herder and Herder (1965); Joseph Peiper. *Death and Immortality* New York: Herder and Herder (1969).

³⁰ See my paper "Treatment Plan for Clients of Vocational Centers and Special Care Residential Units." *International Journal of Philosophical Practice* Elliot Cohen (ed.) Vol. 1, no. 4, (Summer 2003), and two electronic publications "Spiritual Welding 101" and "Spiritual Welding 200" *The Yale Journal for Humanities and*

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³¹ F. Capra, F.T. Mathus and D. Steindl-Rast *Belonging to the Universe*. London: Penguin Books (1992)

³² Jean Paul Sartre, *No Exit: A Play in One Act*. New York: Samuel French, Inc. (1945).

³³ For an excellent introduction to Gabriel Marcel's work from the points of view of analytical and continental philosophy see Brendan Sweetman *The Vision of Gabriel Marcel*. VIBS vol 193. Amsterdam, New York: Editions Rodopi B.V. (2008).

³⁴ Ken Bryson "An Interpretation of Genesis 1.26." *Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (2005) vol. 17, issue 1.

³⁵ Genesis 1:26.

³⁶ Ken Bryson, *Persons and Immortality* VIBS vol 77. Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B.V. (1999).

³⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God* New York: Harper (1954) 72-84.

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³⁹ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* Third Edition London: MacMillan (1985) 5.

⁴⁰ Matthew, 7. 2-4; Mark 9. 2-4 and 9.