AUGUSTINE AND THE CONCEPT OF PERSON

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The concept of "person" has long been a topic of interest in philosophical as well as theological circles. Within recent times, amid the "abortion debate," it has become a contentious issue also in medical and legal circles. In view of the recent concern which often generates more heat than light on the issue, it might be helpful to peruse some of the thoughts of one of the profoundest minds in Western theology on the concept of "person."

Before turning to the thoughts of Augustine, however, perhaps a few preliminary remarks regarding the perennial philosophical discussions of "person" might be helpful in understanding some of the ideas expressed by Augustine. In philosophical circles, of course, it is also true that "person" is by no means an univocal concept. But as one tries to find the common ground from which the bewildering variety of philosophical discussions concerning "person" arises, what seems to emerge is that "person" is commonly used as a metaphysical category in contrast to "thing"; and it easily becomes closely associated with the concept of "self." Also, commonly associated with the concept of "person" is that it denotes a self-conscious being with powers of reasoning, moral judgment, and self-determination. From this basic concept, further theorizing about "person" seems to develop in either of two directions. On the one hand, if "person" is understood as essentially an enduring being having powers of intellect and will, some type of theory of the self as substance results. This has been the dominant theory of the self in Western philosophy, advanced by such diverse thinkers as Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes and Locke. On the other hand, if "person" is understood as essentially a construct of the intellect and will, then since knowing and willing are relational, the result is some type of theory of the self as relational. According to such theory, to be a self is to be related to some other. Relational theories have become much more prominent in nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, particularly among idealists and phenomenologists. Thus one can find various forms of relational theory in such men as Hegel, Buber, and Jaspers.

Now often involved with both of these types of metaphysical theories about "person," is another concept of "person" which is linked with what William O'Connor has called "the ethical use of the term." This is a concept of "person" which has been generated within philosophical circles particularly since the time of Kant. Kant is perhaps the most important and influential modern philosopher to formulate in explicit terms ideas which had a long prior history, but which became the object of respectable philosophical reflection and discussion with Kant's assertion that "persons," as contrasted with "things," are of an unconditional worth; that respect is an attitude which is applicable to persons only and never to things.

Consequently, persons should never be regarded as means to an end, but rather are "ends-in-themselves and sources of value in their own right."  

In tracing the roots of this ethical concept of person which has become so prominent in so much of the philosophical discussions concerning "person" since the time of Kant, it is commonly recognized that the Judeo-Christian tradition played no small part in the inception and propagation of such ideas with respect to the human person. And since Augustine stands as a giant in the expression and influence of Western theology, it is natural to turn to the writings of Augustine when searching for significant contributions to the modern concepts of "person." A number of thinkers have carried out such investigations but have arrived at diverse conclusions. While each seems to agree that Augustine was influential in the development of the concept of "person" in the history of thought, there is no consensus concerning the exact nature of Augustine's concept nor on the consequent influences on later thought. Assessments vary from that of Paul Henry, on the one hand, to that of A.C. Lloyd, on the other. Henry writes that:

"In the history of thought and civilization, Saint Augustine appears to me to be the first thinker who brought into prominence and undertook an analysis of the philosophical and psychological concepts of person and personality."  

In setting out the aims of his essay on *St. Augustine on Personality* Henry declares:

I shall show that this doctrine of the person, though highly tentative and perhaps incomplete, serves to bring Augustine's creative genius and originality to the fore. Nowhere is he more impressive than in this area. I shall make the further point that this doctrine has been a decisive factor in fashioning the modern world. Indeed, it is precisely this which makes him belong to the world of today and of tomorrow.  

No philosophy before Saint Augustine and none independent of him in his own time and in subsequent ages, has ever elaborated so satisfying a concept of personality.

On the other hand, A. C. Lloyd maintains that what Augustine had to say about the concept of person emerges indirectly from his discussion of the being of God in *De Trinitate*, and therefore any claim to find a philosophical theory of the person in Augustine is probably an exaggeration and in need of considerable qualification. And in the final analysis, Lloyd maintains, it is questionable whether Augustine really envisaged his treatise on the Trinity as making any contribution to the subject of human personality at all.  

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The position of this essay is that while Henry’s evaluation of Augustine’s philosophy of the person and its importance in the history of thought is exaggerated, Lloyd’s evaluation does not seem to be sufficiently appreciative of the insights which Augustine expresses nor of the full implications of Augustine’s view. We agree that what can be formulated as Augustine’s concept of “person” is not a rigorous philosophical exposition laid out by Augustine himself, but must be derived indirectly from his theology. Consequently, it is more later thinkers rather than Augustine himself who consider his thoughts as germinal for a philosophy of “person.”

To undertake a discussion of Augustine’s concept of “person” immediately calls for some delimiting of the thought of Augustine to be discussed. It is common knowledge that Augustine’s thought, his philosophy and theology, was in a process of continual change as his intellectual and religious world changed over the course of his life. The same must be said regarding Augustine’s concept of “person” as it can be culled from the full span of his voluminous works. It too underwent a radical change as his thought and theology matured. However, since it is commonly agreed that it was not until 396 in *De Agone Christiano* that Augustine employed the term “person,” and that it becomes a crucial term in his *De Trinitate* written between the years 400 to 416, it is the concept of “person” as it is conceived in the later writings of the mature Augustine which will be the primary focus of this essay. His mature understanding of “person,” it will be maintained, is derived from his struggle with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as well as that of the Incarnation of the Christ; and his thinking in these areas is determinative for his view of the human person, which involves aspects of all three views of “person,” the substantive, the relational, and the ethical.

Turning first of all, then, to Augustine’s reflections on the Persons of the Trinity, his relevant conclusions are found primarily in the fifth book of *De Trinitate.* In this book he is concerned with the Arian denial of the full divinity of Christ. The Arian argument was basically this, in the framework of Aristotle’s *Categories:* God is pure substance. In God there are no accidents or qualities. Consequently, everything which is said or understood of God is said according to His substance. Now the Father is said to be unbegotten, while the Son is said to be begotten. Unbegotten and begotten are clearly different; and since these terms must apply to Their substance, the Son is in His substance different from the Father and His substance. Consequently, they are not of the same substance or *homoousion* as the Council of Nicea had decided.

Augustine first counters this argument by pointing out that according to the Scriptures, Jesus Himself declared: “I and the Father are one.” Therefore, even according to the Arian argument, these words too must apply to substance and, therefore, the Father and the Son must be of one substance.

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Furthermore, the Scriptures say of the Son, "He did not consider it robbery to be equal to God." So here again if what is said of the Father and the Son is said of substance, then They must be equal in substance. On the other hand, if the Arians want to say that these statements do not refer to substance, then they must admit that something can be said about God which does not refer to substance.\(^1\) But since Augustine maintains that the Father and the Son are one in substance, how are we to understand that the Father is said to be "unbegotten," while the Son is "begotten?" First of all, Augustine agrees that these terms are not accidents of God's substance, because accidents can be lost by change or separation; and God is unchangeable and so nothing can be lost from God. So it is true that nothing can be said of God according to accident. But, on the other hand, Augustine contends, this does not necessitate that everything that is said of Him must be said according to substance. It is also possible, Augustine maintains, to speak of God according to relation. It is in regard to relation that one can speak of the three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These terms are used in relation to each other. The Father is "Father" in relation to the Son; the Son is "Son" in relation to the Father; and the Holy Spirit is "Holy Spirit" in relation to the Father and the Son. So these terms are used not in reference to themselves, but in reference to the relationship of one to the other. Similarly the term "begotten" designates the relation of generation: the Son generated from the Father. The term "unbegotten" is a negative relational term designating that the Father is not generated from any other. And so these terms, too, do not refer to substance. Neither do they refer to accidents, however, for these relations are not changeable nor can they be separated from God. Thus the divine Persons are one in substance, but threefold in relation.\(^2\)

It is in discussing these non-accidental relations, which later Scholastics were to refer to as "subsistent relations" or "transcendental relations," that Augustine employs the term "person." But it is evident in this context that Augustine does not have a formal definition of a "person"; for when he considers the question as to what it means to say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three, he acknowledges that human language is at a loss to say three what. Consequently, he says:

But the formula three persons has been coined, not in order to give a complete explanation by means of it, but in order that we might not be obliged to remain silent.\(^3\)

As a result, Bernard Lonergan maintains that in this context the term "person" is simply a heuristic concept for Augustine meaning just what there are three of in the Trinity.\(^4\) It must be said, however, that in under-

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\(^3\) St. Augustine: *Op. cit.*, V 9, p. 188.

standing the Persons of the Trinity in terms of relations Augustine took a significant step toward entertaining a relational view of the human person.

As a corollary to his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, Augustine comes to the doctrine of the Incarnation. His summary statement in *On Catechizing the Uninstructed* is:

God in His mercy, desiring to deliver men from this destruction (i.e., from everlasting punishment) if only they be not enemies to themselves and resist not the mercy of their Creator, sent His only-begotten Son (i.e., His Word) equal to Himself, by which Word He created all things. And He, though abiding in His Godhead and neither departing from His Father nor being changed in anything, yet by taking upon Himself human nature, and appearing to men in mortal flesh, came unto men; that as death entered into the human race by one man who was first created (i.e., Adam) because he consented to his wife, who had been led astray by the devil, so that they transgressed the commandment of God - so also through one man, who is also God, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, all who believe in Him, after their past sins had been utterly blotted out, might enter into eternal life.¹

In explaining the nature and manner of the Incarnation Augustine again was confronted with the idea of the Person or Persons in Jesus Christ. If the second Person of the Trinity became incarnate and lived as a man on earth, He must be acknowledged as true God and true man. But does this mean that there were two Persons in Christ, a divine Person and a human Person? Augustine's answer is, "No." His invariable position is that in the Incarnation the Divine Person assumed, or took upon Himself, a complete human nature. But He did not thereby become a human person. The Person of Jesus Christ is divine. This does not contradict the truth that the Son of God assumed a specific and individual human nature. For Augustine maintains that Christ's human nature is that of a whole, real, individual man who in all respects was like all other human beings, in His humanity, only that He was without sin. But this does not entail that He was a human person as we are persons. It must be remembered that the notion of "person" in Augustine denotes a relation of distinct subsisting elements in unity. Thus in the human person, this personal unity relates together a rational soul and a physical body. To be a human person involves basically to have this kind of psychosomatic relational unity. This does not exhaust the meaning of "human person" for Augustine, but it forms a part of the fundamental conceptual framework in terms of which the human person is to be understood. Now a personal unity is also present in Jesus Christ, but in a divine way. The Person of Jesus Christ is in this union of the divine and human natures; hence Christ's "Person" must always be understood to involve this perfect union instantiated in His Incarnate

¹ St. Augustine: *On Catechizing the Uninstructed* XXVI, 52.
existence. Christ unites in one Person the divine Logos and a human nature, namely a rational soul and body. Thus Jesus Christ is true God and true man.

It is interesting to note that in Augustine's discussion of the Trinity (the one essence or substance and the three Persons) "Person" is understood in terms of the relationships within the one substance. Each of the three Persons has a distinctive relationship within the one substance. In his discussion of the Incarnation, "Person" is understood in terms of the unified relationship of three substances. In the Trinity there is one substance and three Persons. In the Incarnation there are three substances in one Person. In the Trinity, the one divine substance is constituted by the threefold relations - the Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Incarnation the one Person holds in unified relation three substances: the divine Logos, the rational soul, and the physical body.

The identity of the Person of Jesus Christ, however, is understood explicitly as the divine Logos, the second Person of the Trinity. This enables Augustine to constantly emphasize that this keeps Jesus in continued relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, which again was intended as a direct refutation of the Arian denial of the full divinity of Jesus Christ. In his struggle to adequately express his theology of the Incarnation, Augustine matured into this emphasis on the unity of Person in Christ. It was not until 411-412 A.D. that Augustine seemed satisfied with his conceptualization of the Incarnation. His mature formulation seems to adumbrate the Chalcedonian formula of 451 A.D. Characteristic of Augustine's formulation is his use of the analogy of the union of body and soul in human beings to illuminate the union of the two natures in the one Person of Jesus Christ. It is in the use of this analogy that a more traditional view of "person" as substance emerges.

Perhaps the most we can say then is that Augustine's discussion of the Trinity proposes a theory of the human person involving a relational view of the self because the human being is made in the image of God. At the same time his discussion of the Incarnation leads him beyond the Platonic notion of the self simply as a substance, and yet it leads him to continue to view the human person in a substantial way. The resultant of these two ideas leads him to emphasize various relations to God, to fellow human beings, and within oneself as essential to the human being as a person. In summary, then, we might say that for Augustine, "person" is a complex integrated unity of being, relationships, and activities.

To see that this is the case, let us turn to selected instances of Augustine's discussion. Returning first of all to his discussion of the Incarnation, in a letter from 412 the analogous way in which Augustine was thinking of the Person of Christ and the human person is evident. He writes:

But there are some who request an explanation of how God is joined to man so as to become the single person of Christ, as if they themselves could explain something that happens every day,
namely how the soul is joined to the body so as to form the single person of a man.1

It is only around this time that Augustine used the expression "one person" to include both the two distinct natures in Christ as well as the unity of person. Augustine had come to an understanding of "person" as a unified complex. This is a result of his crucial distinction between "nature" and "person." In the same letter, he writes:

For as the soul makes use of the body in a single person to form a man, so God makes use of man in a single Person to form Christ. In the former person there is a mingling of soul and body; in the latter Person there is a mingling of God and man; but the hearer must abstract from the property of material substance by which two liquids are usually so mingled that neither retains its special character, although among such substances light mingled with air remains unchanged. Therefore, the person of man is a mingling of soul and body, but the Person of Christ is a mingling of God and man, for, when the Word of God is joined to a soul which has a body, it takes on both the soul and the body at once. The one process happens daily in order to beget men; the other happened once to set men free.2

Also in De Trinitate IV, 21,30 he says:

Man was united to, and in some way, commingled with the Word of God into the unity of the person, when the fullness of time came, the Son of God, made of a woman, was sent into this world, in order that He might also be the Son of Man on account of the sons of men.3

Augustine’s mature view of the Incarnation had very direct and immediate implications for his view of the unity of body and soul in the human being. It led him away from the view of the Platonists that the soul was a prisoner incarcerated within the body, and that the soul was constantly longing to escape and to be free of the body. Through his pious awe of the Son of God assuming a human body for the sake of human beings, he moves to a more positive evaluation of the body and a greater emphasis upon the unity of body and soul in the individual human person. He consequently described the body and soul as being united by a “natural appetite,” and their separation at death as a “tearing” or being “wrenched asunder.” The relationship of the soul and body he compared to the marriage relationship of husband and wife.

We shall return to further implications of Augustine’s understanding of the Incarnation for his concept of the human person. However, understanding the human person as a unity of body and soul, we next might note how Augustine’s concept of the person is enriched by his introspective

(2) Ibid.
(3) St. Augustine: De Trinitate (IV, 21, 30), p. 169f.
analysis of the soul. And this is done in the context of his understanding of the Persons of the Trinity. That this holds implications for his concept of the human person is due to the fact that he takes as fundamental that Scripture tells us that man was made in the image of God. Therefore if one carefully analyses human being, it should provide us with clues regarding the essence of God. And if one’s mind is illumined by God’s truth to catch some vision of the mystery of Divine Being, that, in turn, should give some insight into the nature of human being and the human person. This is the procedure which Augustine adopts, and so to understand the embellishment of the concept of “person” in his reflections one needs to note the ways in which Augustine finds the human person to be an image of God and specifically an image of the divine Trinity.

God is the triune God, one in essence, three in Persons. Therefore, if there are images of triune personality, they simply reflect the Trinity of God in unity. Now the being who is expressly made in the image of God is the human being, and Augustine suggests that the image of God would be reflected most accurately in the soul. Furthermore, in the soul, the clearest image of God is found in the mind, for this is the highest part of the human being and the one nearest to God. The image of God discovered there is triune in character. The three primary images Augustine identifies are the triads of, first, mind, knowledge, and love; secondly, memory of the self, understanding, and will; and thirdly, memory of God, understanding, and love. They all have the following in common: first, they are all found in the mind, or the spiritual eye of the soul; secondly, they are all essential qualities of the mind in subsistent relation to each other; and thirdly, the relative consubstantiality of these qualities constituting these created trinities gives us some idea of the real consubstantiality of the three Persons of the Trinity.

In the first mental trinity, the mind loves itself as a natural affirmation of itself. Thus the thing that loves is exactly equal to the object loved. Now it is impossible to love oneself without knowing oneself. Therefore the mind cannot love itself without knowing itself. Knowing itself is an easy thing for the mind, because it is incorporeal and therefore essentially intelligible. Now just as the mind’s love for itself is exactly equal to the mind, so the knowledge it has of itself is exactly equal to the mind. Thus the mind, love, and knowledge are three, and these three are one; and these three that are one are equal.

The distinctive feature of this first image is that it appears entirely within the substance of the mind, before it appears in actions. The thing which guarantees the substantial unity of the mind with its love and knowledge is also the basis for the substantiality of its knowledge and love. If self-love and self-knowledge were in the mind as accidents in a subject, the mind could only know or love itself, but the fact is that it can love and know anything else. Therefore it is not a mind which has knowledge or a love of itself; it is a mind which is love and knowledge substantially and therefore naturally capable of knowing and loving itself pending the time when it will love and know everything else. And vice versa, the love and knowledge the
mind has of itself are substances in virtue of their being its substance. Their substantiality is born of their consubstantiality, and this is the reason why these three terms constitute a trinity.

The second mental trinity is memory, intelligence, and will. The memory Augustine portrays here is the mind’s memory of itself. It often happens that the mind does not think of itself, or see itself, even though it is always present to itself. To denote this imperceived presence Augustine uses the same word which can be used for recollections or knowledge we have but are not using at the moment. The situation is the same in both. I know something but I am not thinking about it, so Augustine says it is present in my memory; my mind is always present but I am not thinking of it, so I say that I have a memory of myself when the memory recalls the mind. Under the influence of the eternal reasons the mind can discover itself as it truly is, and it produces a true knowledge or understanding of itself. It expresses itself. It says itself, as it were, and this self-expression is what we call a word although unformed and unvocalized.

In this, namely in the act whereby the mind expresses itself, we have an image of the Son’s generation from the Father. For as the Father eternally conceives a perfect expression of Himself which is the divine Word, so the human mind, made productive by the eternal reason of the Word, produces a true knowledge of itself within itself. Since all true knowledge and understanding is of necessity a knowledge of the Word’s eternal truths, the very act of conceiving truth is but an image within us of the Word’s conception by the Father within the Trinity.

However, the generation of the word within the mind implies a third element also. The mind recalls itself, even though it is always present to itself, through a desire to know itself, and so willing is also involved in this second mental trinity. Thus memory in the second trinity corresponds to mind in the first trinity, understanding corresponds to knowledge, and will corresponds to love.

The third mental trinity portrays not simply relations of substance within the soul as the first two do, but reveals relations between the soul and God. This image makes its appearance in the mind when God is sought through reason and will, and the mind is illuminated with understanding and wisdom. If the soul does not engage in this effort, it can still remember and love itself, but its life is folly. If it, on the other hand, turns toward God who made it and thereby becomes aware of its character as a divine image, then remembering itself, expressing itself in a word, and loving itself will be the same as recalling God in the way He expresses and loves Himself. By this a wisdom is born in man, a wisdom that is nothing less than a participation in God’s Wisdom and that restores the bond between creature and Creator which was broken in the Fall. It is true that God is always with man since His power, light, and love continually bestow being, knowledge, and life on him; but it is not true that man is always with God because we constantly forget Him though we have from Him everything we have. To be with God means precisely to remember Him, to know Him through understanding,
and to love Him. Thus the third mental trinity is the memory of God, understanding of divine wisdom, and love of God.

These mental trinities portray the human person as he is in himself; but as the trinity which relates the human mind to God already indicates, there are triadic relationships which also reflect the image of God in the human person, but disclose the individual as a person in relation to others. This becomes evident in Augustine’s analysis of the phenomenon of love. In Book VIII of his treatise on the Trinity he discusses love at length. Love too is analyzed as a triadic relation involving the lover, that which is loved, and the love that unites them. This, of course, reflects the relations among the Persons of the Trinity. The Father loves the Son and is loved by the Son; the Son loves the Father and is loved by the Father; and the Holy Spirit is the principle of unity within the Trinity. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is also our Spirit, since He is given to God’s people. And so the Holy Spirit is the principle of unity both within the Trinity and among those who follow God. Thus Augustine asserts that we are to imitate the unity of the Trinity both in relation to God and among ourselves. In Book VI, 5,7, he writes:

...the Holy Spirit also subsists in the same unity and equality of substance...(namely of the Father and the Son). Through Him both are joined together; through Him the begotten is loved by the begetter, and in turn loves Him who begot Him; in Him they preserve the unity of spirit through the bond of peace, not by a participation but by their own essence, not by the gift of anyone superior to themselves but by their own gift. And we are commanded by grace to imitate the unity, both in our relations with God as well as among ourselves.¹

True love, which unites us with God and our fellow human beings in peace, also brings joy, which also pertains especially to the Holy Spirit, who is the joyful union, the love of the Father and the Son. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are able to participate in the joy that true love brings. Thus Augustine’s analysis of the interior relations of the Persons of the Trinity lays the foundation for his view of the ideal relations among all creatures.

Now since true love allows us to participate in the joyful community of the good, whose principle of unity is God Himself, the Person of the Holy Spirit, Augustine embarks on an investigation of true love. He first of all emphasizes that only true love may be called “love,” otherwise it is simply desire.

But this is true love, [he writes,] that while holding fast to the truth, we may live justly, and therefore, may despise everything mortal for the sake of the love of men, whereby we wish them to live justly. For in this way we can be prepared even to die with profit for our brethren, which the Lord Jesus has taught us by His example.²

(1) VI, 5,7; op.cit., p. 206.
(2) VIII, 7, 10; op.cit., p. 260.
Love enables us to know God because God is love. The very experience of truly loving another human being united to us in the bond of love is the experience of God working in us. Our knowledge of that love is a knowledge of God. Since this love is entirely present within us it is known more clearly even than the other human being whom we love. Our experience of this love binds us together with all the good angels and servants of God for it is itself an experience of God. Augustine writes:

Let no one say: ‘I do not know what I should love.’ Let him love his brother and he will love the same love [namely, God]. For he knows the love by which he loves more than the brother whom he loves. And so, God can now become more known than his brother, actually more known because more present, more known because more within him, more known because more certain. Embrace love, God, and embrace God by love. It is love itself which unites all the good angels and all the servants of God by the bond of holiness, and unites us and them mutually with our selves and makes us subject to Himself. Therefore, the more we are cured of the swelling of pride, the more we are full of love, and of what, if not of God, is he full who is full of love?¹

This love of love, namely the love of God, intimately binds all together who share in it. It unites all the objects of love—the self, our fellow human beings, and God. In order to love true love, we must love something truly. But we are only able to love something truly through the love of God. The two loves commanded of us in the New Testament, the love of God and the love of neighbour, are really one. If we love our neighbour truly it is only because that love has been given to us by God. The desire for God, given to the soul by God, unites the soul to all those who desire God. Thus Augustine treats true love as an objective subsistent which unites the lover and the beloved. This third subsistent which is true love is God’s gift of Himself, for God is love. And so he writes:

Therefore, when we love our brother from love, we love our brother from God; nor can it happen that we do not love above all else that same love by which we love our brother. From this we conclude that these two commandments cannot be without one another. For since ‘God is love,’ he who loves love, surely loves God; but he must needs love love who loves his brother.²

For Augustine, then, no one can truly love another person unless he is given the gift of true love from God. Augustine consistently stresses that our end is a communal one; that human life is a journey whose ultimate destination is the vision of God enjoyed in communion with others. The social, unitive nature of love is unmistakable in De Trinitate. God Himself is a love unity of distinct Persons. The Trinity is reflected by all other unions wrought by true love. In our earthly experiences of love, we take delight in

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¹ VIII, 8, 12; op.cit., p. 262f.
² VIII, 8, 12; op.cit.: p. 264.
being united to another person. What we experience in such love is a finite reflection of the loving Unity that is the Triune God. It is a temporal anticipation of the eternal communion we are to experience when we enjoy the vision of God together with all the good angels and the saints. Thus, all true love is from God and this is why Augustine tells us that in loving our brother we see the Trinity.

In his analysis of love, then, we again see Augustine going beyond a purely formal concept of person, as well as the traditional concept of person as a substance. A person is a human being who loves, but to love puts him into relation with another being either human or divine who is also capable of love. And if it is true love, it brings love, lover, and loved into a divine-human triadic unity.

Augustine’s theory of knowledge in De Trinitate takes him in the same direction, namely, a view of the human being in terms of personal relations. This expresses itself in the theory of illumination, according to which human knowledge involves a special activity of God. Augustine defines wisdom as the intellectual cognition of eternal things. He makes it quite clear that wisdom is given to the soul by God, who is Wisdom. Augustine himself summarizes his position in a passage that displays the inter-relation of his theory of love and theory of knowledge.

Whoever, then, is being renewed in the knowledge of God, and in justice and holiness of truth, by making progress day by day, transfers his love from temporal to eternal things, from visible to intelligible things, from carnal to spiritual things, and constantly endeavours to restrain and to lessen the desire for the former, and to bind himself by love to the latter. But he does so in proportion to the divine help that he receives, for the saying of God is: ‘Without me you can do nothing.’

With this analysis of love and knowledge, we can now return to Augustine’s understanding of the Incarnation, for to Augustine the supreme Model and Example of personal being is disclosed in the Second Person of the Trinity. In His Incarnation, which is an expression of God’s love on the human level, Christ’s divine person relates Him, not to some single human person, or even group, large or small, nor exclusively to a certain time or place, but as the divine Person who comes to man as a Man for the redemption of the world, all human beings are brought into relationship with Him. It is for this purpose that the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate that He might renew in human persons the lost image of God and reconstitute their true nature and existence.

With this extension of the significance of the human person into the social and ethical dimension, we have ranged over the germinal thoughts regarding the concept of a person in Augustine’s mature writings. It is evident that Augustine does not present an explicit theory of the human person. It also seems evident that Augustine’s understanding of the human person is always controlled by his own greatest personal experience, namely his

(1) XIV, 17, 23; op.cit., p. 444f.
conversion. And so he expounds a view which understands the human person as the image of God and consequently as of infinite worth. In accordance with this understanding human beings are constituted as persons by their relations to God and to other human persons.

If we try to summarize Augustine’s view in a formal statement, we might say that “person” is a being imaging the essence of God, of unconditional worth, characterized by a complex of internal and external relationships, which are integrated into a unity of being, relation, and activity.

Of course, the inferences which may be drawn from such a view can be very far-reaching and wide-ranging. The range of inspiration which some have found in Augustine’s thoughts is eloquently expressed by Paul Henry when he writes:

Augustine teaches us that the person, while being an absolute, ... is also and essentially a being ... related to others, and defined as person by this very relativity. We are so by our birth, not born alone but procreated by our parents, themselves created by God and linked together in a spiritual and physical love. Our very being is genetically constituted in a living relation to others, to our parents, to God. Augustine teaches us the fundamental truth that we are really persons only inasmuch as we recognize the full status of other persons as related to us; that personality is not egocentric but altruistic; that its natural movements and richness are not centripetal but centrifugal, that the more we are ourselves, not only as individuals but as persons, the more we exist with and for others and are drawn to others and others drawn to us. He teaches us that personality expresses itself in giving and receiving; in ‘communicability,’ rather than ‘incommunicability,’ in sharing rather than in possessing, in togetherness and closeness rather than in proud isolationism, whether this be intellectual, cultural, economic or political. When we have learned these truths, then, and only then, shall we be able to build up between men, in law and in life, an I-Thou relationship transcending the I-It relationship of mere Subject and Object. We shall recognize in the ‘other,’ beyond all qualities and defects, beyond even his expressed needs, the unfathomable depths of his being and of his essence and of his very esse, existence, which springs from God’s infinite Being. We shall come to see that which is unique in Him and yet is also ours by right because he wills to share it with us and we with him. ... We shall understand that to be persons we have to accept and receive and not be content only to give, and that between persons the one is just as indispensable (sic) as the other.¹

Today when there is such selfishness and strife, let us recall and revive these precious intuitions of Saint Augustine on person and personality. Let us realize that as individuals and as nations we

¹ Paul Henry: op.cit., p. 23f.
can achieve maturity and fullness, not independently and alone but only by interdependence and cooperation, by giving and receiving. We are, it is true, little absolutes, and yet at the same time always related, correlated and interrelated with other persons and personalities. We are not meant to live in a depersonalized world. May we, inspired by Augustine’s own personality, discover person and personality. ¹

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