[Essay]

# Philosophy of Life
## A Western Posthuman Identity: A First-Person Reflection on Life

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 **Abstract**

Most articles in contemporary Western philosophy are about research into other people's ideas, it seems to me. However, I offer a first-person critical reflection on my own philosophical understanding and development of my individual identity in light of a posthuman context. Posthumanism is a philosophical movement within Western philosophy, but it is not, as yet, a philosophical movement as such. That is, unlike humanism, it lacks its own established history and tradition of thinking. A meaningful posthuman identity provides a fulfilling life for the believer as well as the non-believer through a perpetual process of acceptance and rejection of ideas and notions that arise within experience. When an individual is conscious of his or her changeable identity, which is the product of a philosophical autobiography, one can be at ease in an ever-changing world and at peace with oneself, I maintain.

After World War I, a new Western world was born, as it were. However, as J. Middleton Murry noted, it was really not a new world but the old one clearly seen for the first time. It was a new world for those for whom the lines of cultural demarcation were understood entirely differently from what they had seemed to be. This new world, at first, seemed cold, alien and hostile. Yet soon afterwards it appeared to have fresh hope as new insights were revealed and new lessons learned from a past and broken world. This is where I am today. That is, I continue to learn new lessons and insights about life from my past humanistic and somewhat broken, philosophical world.

In consideration of a posthuman faith life, I continue to seek deeper insights into the presence of God. I have come to realize that it is not how accurate I am in my understanding that is important, but rather how truthfully, I interpret my experience. I am not seeking objective truth concerning my experience, but I am seeking an authentic interpretation of my experience in contrast to illusion or fantasy which are tricks of an imagining mind. In other words, I seek what is

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truly real. And, any authentic interpretation I make must be made in light of the philosophical changes taking place in contemporary Western society. As I contemplate the changes in my life-world, I see that phenomenological philosophy is not readily accepted by many of my contemporaries as a means of achieving authenticity. Not everyone accepts that the phenomenological method is one that satisfies and clarifies. To some, in fact, the phenomenological method obscures their understanding and thus dissatisfies them. Yet, in my case the opposite has occurred. Over time, I came to the conclusion that scholasticism with its dichotomous structure of philosophical understanding hindered my thinking.

I do realize, of course, that the limitations of scholasticism are the limitations traceable to a particular time and culture. They are the limitations of a philosophical language and speech that have not kept pace with modern experience. In my case, not even a revised form of scholasticism satisfactorily overcame these limitations. The revised form of scholasticism to which I refer is neo-Thomism. Through neo-Thomism I was not able to express satisfactorily my experience. However, given a phenomenological interpretation of my experience in light of a non-dichotomous relational unity, I was able to interpret satisfactorily my experience and thereby overcome the limitations of scholasticism. Now I am able to contrast my present experience with my past experience and act consciously to create a posthuman life-world. This means that I live within my cultural limitations, but I need not be constrained by them. I experienced these cultural limitations in my past life-world governed by a philosophy of classical humanism, however, I need not experience them in my posthuman life-world. I attempt to transcend them even if success is only partial.

In my posthuman life-world the interpretive task is contingent and perpetual. As an existential thinker, I know that there is no such thing as a final philosophy or theology. I conceive my work as different from the work of the theologian in the days when the humanistic philosophical systems of the West were being constructed. As I see it, the task of the contemporary religious philosopher and theologian is as follows. It is to make known the truthfulness of *reasoned belief* in and about God to a new generation of Western philosophers through a phenomenological approach to philosophy, that is, through a dehellenized philosophy. I find that the principle merit and usefulness of a dehellenized philosophy is its capacity for giving a human identity to experience. Philosophy is culturally influenced. But, unlike classical philosophers, posthuman

philosophers choose not to conform to a given system of knowledge, nor a methodology of established norms. Posthuman philosophy presents an alternative conscious understanding and as such it can utilize any methodology of interpretation. To my mind, any philosophy, even the untutored sort, can provide some degree of satisfaction in religious interpretation.

History shows that natural theology, viewed by some as a type of philosophy and as an academic discipline in its own right, originated outside the Western Catholic ecclesiastical tradition. Natural theology, as a philosophy, is the proper way of inquiring into the world as created by God, rather than inquiring into God as revealed in the world. St Thomas held to this distinction, according to Edward Schillebeeckx. As an ecclesial theologian, I am required to interpret revelation within the *sensus fidelium*, that is, within the understanding of the faithful who constitute the church. But as a philosopher of theology I am not limited to this ecclesial context.

For any serious philosophy and theology to bear fruit in the posthuman context, it must engage the personal (qualitative) and existential (quantitative) creative experience of the faithful. At one point in the process of evaluating my inherited philosophical understanding, I compared and contrasted the thought of George Tyrrell (1861-1909) to that of Leslie Dewart (1922-2009). I then compared their thoughts with my own philosophical understanding. In this comparison, I found it unfortunate that, at this time in the development of Western philosophy and theology, the place of philosophy in relation to theology has been usurped to a great extent by sociology and psychology.

Posthuman thinking represents a shift away from the old style of theological polemics towards a new approach of ecumenical cooperation among Western theologians. For such thinkers, theology, which traditionally has been influenced by classical philosophy, has shifted to a discursive theology, often interpreted through phenomenological approach. It was within this context of a discursive theology that I was able to make sense of my personal experience and re-adjust my identity in life accordingly. And in making sense of my experience, I found that I had to undertake an existential approach to tell of my "that was then; this is now" experience. Being a theologian, understanding the presence of God is a particular focus in my life. My theological preoccupation has its roots in the Roman Catholic theological perspective that was in vogue in the early 20th century, particularly that of the *Nouvelle Théologie*. It was through this model of theologizing that I found the beginnings of fresh insights leading to posthuman

thresholds of theological insight.

I draw the reader's attention to the fact that many creative and insightful contributions from philosophers and theologians are often quoted and discussed by academics and professional journalists. These reviewers and professional journalists often truly believe they have understood, and correctly expounded the ideas of innovative philosophical and theological thinkers. And in most cases, they probably have done so, but not always. George Tyrrell's life-story of creative and innovative theologizing is a case in point. The appreciation of his style of creative and innovative thinking is not as well recognized as it could be among professional theologians. Although to the discerning reader of his books his influence on theology at the time of Vatican II is readily discernable. The majority of academics have discussed Tyrrell from an historical perspective, often in relation to the Modernist Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church. David Schultenover in his book described, not the Modernist Movement and Tyrrell's role in it, but the intellectual development of a major contributor to that movement by focusing on the man and his thought.

Two modern developments that offer some rationale for the creative tensions that exist within the contemporary Western philosophical and theological tradition, are also significant for posthuman thinking. The first is that medieval Christendom has come to an end and secularism exists in its wake. The other development is that a psychological understanding of the person has taken the place of a philosophical understanding of the person.

One of the often-heard criticisms of Modernity is that it sets up a false confidence in rationalism and science. Given their capacity in categorizing and explaining human experience, rationalism and science are often seen as being able to convey the totality of human experience and personal identity. Once I realized that this could not ultimately be the case, that neither of them could convey the totality of human experience nor identity, I favoured a posthuman approach which directed me away from the dichotomous Hellenic philosophical understanding still somewhat evident in the sciences. The phenomenological approach permits me to establish a non-dichotomous relationship to others in my life-world and thus re-define my identity.

The social institution in which I originally framed my theology is the church. Exploring the various denominations within the church is a specialized theological discipline called ecclesiology. The differing interpretations of the sacred texts by these denominations, plus the political, philosophical, and

historical reform movements occurring among them contributed to a diverse self-understanding of the church. In a posthuman philosophical context, the church will most likely not be a social arrangement *imposed* upon the faithful. Rather, the church will be disclosed as a communion of communities *constituted* by the faithful, each community with its own self-understanding, history, culture and tradition.

There is a variety of expression in the church which reflects the variety of local cultures. Because of the relationship in the West between philosophy and theology, my contention for many years has been that the theological problems of the churches are preceded by philosophical problems which need to be first addressed and resolved. Then, one may address the theological problems and their solutions. It was Leslie Dewart's understanding of "dehellenization," a philosophical notion which he did not present as a negative concept, meaning "unhellenization," that provided a conscious opportunity for me to begin to evaluate my philosophical inheritance and subsequently my identity as a posthuman individual.

Theologians who theologize formally on behalf of a believing community, are required to think as professionals, as it were. However, pre-modern society and culture were not oriented to professionalism, but to authoritarianism. A hierarchical order is the requisite form for any authoritarian organization structured for absolute government. In contrast, contemporary Western society and modern religious organizations are oriented toward professionalism, democracy and the principle of personal interpretation. Within the churches of the Reformation, the development of democratic governance is clearly evident. For the hierarchical churches, both Catholic and Orthodox, the principle of subsidiarity fulfills the intent of democratic governance.

Contemporary theologians, both Eastern and Western, are beginning to realize that the present structure of church government which reflects classical theism requires change. The present governing structure of the church is based on a territorial notion and not on a gift of God's grace, i.e., divine charism. For an Orthodox perspective on "divine charism" Nicholas Ferencz's words suffice, I believe. "The key for understanding the authority and structure of the Orthodox Church is the unity of the church and, to a lesser extent, its catholicity. The church must be one for it is the Body of Christ, which is one. No division or

split can exist in this body, else it is not truly Christ's."[1] The notion of territorial jurisdiction is an obstacle to the ecclesial governance of the church today. (Note that I say "ecclesial governance," not "ecclesiastical government.") And, as such, the church must change in the posthuman context. Such territorial constructions will not fruitfully conform to the Christian's social condition in posthumanity. Further, it would be a theological error to promote any idea of a universal territorial super-church composed of all the faithful based on the philosophical notion of human political expediency.

My philosophical reflection suggests to me that a posthuman church would reveal a new ecclesiology that is based upon the relationships among the faithful, not on the theory of ecclesiastical territorial government. This shift from theory to relationships brings about a new personal identity for the believer. In short, it is tantamount to a conversion experience. Traditional political *government* becomes *governance* when based on mutual mature relationships. Present day churches, in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, remain based on a notion of territorial jurisdiction. However, there is an option for future governance of these churches through an ecclesiology, one not territorially re-ordered, but one that is reconstituted in light of a posthuman consciousness. Such an ecclesial possibility requires that I reappraise the development of my Christian identity. This is so because I am living in a culture that has not been envisioned or brought about only by one factor. My culture is determined by many causes. Among them are physical, metaphysical, mental, human, and divine causes. Indeed, my culture seems to be over-determined given the combination of these and other factors. By "over-determined" I mean no one factor can be held responsible for the direction and development of the culture in which I encounter the presence of God and subsequently determine my identity. Thus, I take this to mean that, in truth, God is not to be held solely responsible for everything that happens to me, or happens within the cosmos for that matter. That is to say that I have a role in the interpreting God's participation in my life.

This role allows me to re-conceive of myself as a responsible co-agent in, and as a responsible co-creator of, my culture and society. This is a posthuman state of consciousness through which I am able to work towards building the kingdom of God on earth within the presence of God. But not in any political sense. Rather, I understand it existentially. My co-participation in the divine

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[1] Ferencz (2006), p.17.

creativity is the risk that God takes with me, as it were, which includes possible failure. I recall the ironic prophetic remark, attributed to Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) about failure in the Kingdom of God: *Jésus annonçait le Royaume et c'est l'Église qui est venue.* (Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom and what arrived was the Church.)

The traditional Catholic understanding of the church is as old as the first epistle of St. Clement, (circa 75-110), in which the church is conceived as a divine institution. According to St. Clement, the church is an institution with officers whose duty is determined by an official status within the institution. In this understanding, the officers of the church are analogous to officers of the state. To my mind, Jesus of Nazareth would never contemplate endorsing any form of church government patterned on a model whose leaders were analogous to the state.[2] Further, it is clear that the apostles believed that the end of the world would occur within their lifetime, and they made no provision for an institutional church in the sense that it exists today. Yet, the spirit that animates the church today is the same spirit that animated Jesus of Nazareth. I argue that this same spirit lays the foundations for thresholds in Catholicity, not Catholicism, in the posthuman context.

It must be remembered that while individual humans do exist, humanity does not. Humanity is an imaginative concept. Humanity, as an abstracted (imaginative) idea, is expressed through a variety of philosophical, political and cultural perspectives. Further, God may be conceived as immanently present, or conceived as absent (*via negativa*) in Western philosophical, political and cultural perspectives. Victor Segesvary reminds us that the concept of humanity, understood as an existential community of individuals, is too large a concept to be the bearer of a single shared culture. In this respect, the posthuman world will not be that different from the world of the ancient cultures. It is, however, somewhat urgent that I find creative ways to interpret what I am likely to find unique in the experience of my identity in a posthuman world. However, in interpreting my posthuman life-world it is more responsible for me to promote a reasoned philosophy rather than duplicate any previous cultural folklore in accounting for my experience. Psychology, sociology, history, anthropology, etc., assist me, to some degree, but it is only philosophy that is in the privileged position to support my theological reflection. In this reflection my task is to

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[2]  Cf. Mark 10:35-45.

express, to clarify and deepen the understanding of my conscious self-development. In understanding my conscious self-development there are two pairs of terms not to be confused. They are "subjectivity" and "objectivity," and "subjectivism" and "objectivism." These pairs are not interchangeable. The former pair belongs to phenomenology and is qualitative. The latter pair belongs to scholasticism and is quantitative.

Platonic, and some neo-platonic philosophers, continue to subscribe to ideal material forms in interpreting human experience. Yet, they do not admit to any reality of the relationships among these ideal forms. This understanding is not consistent with a posthuman perspective in which the "space" between subject and object, i.e., person and thing, must itself be acknowledged in determining human identity. This is another way of distinguishing between "me" and "not-me." As a phenomenologist, I hold to an existential relationship among entities and see no reason to accept the platonic theory of material forms. I have adopted this position because my philosophical contemplation of being (my existential identity) has not supported the existence of the idea of material forms. All entities, be they living or non-living, are in a relational state among themselves.

Being conscious, I differentiate between that which is "me" and that which is "not-me." I am aware of my conscious self, that is, "me," as manifested through my body, yet differing from my body. I am also aware of "me" as distinguishable from other physical and meta-physical entities. In short, "I" am not my body. Neither am "I" my spirit, nor any meta-physical form separate from my body, i.e., my soul. Rather, as a human being, I experience myself as an incarnated entity (a unity of physical and meta-physical components) who is in a relationship with other beings, some incarnated like myself. By incarnated, I mean that I am an "in-the-flesh" living entity possessing a unique human identity, i.e. consciousness. As a human incarnation, I exist in such a way that I can relate myself to myself as well as to others. As a human incarnation, I do not experience myself as a dichotomized being, united by the joining of a body and a soul originally existing separately. However, I experience myself as an individuated being, differentiated from others as "me." Whether the human soul is immortal or not, is another matter that does not concern me here.

In my dehellenized philosophy, I recognize three unique moments of insight. They are: 1) the realization of my status as a reflexive thinker, 2) the realization of my individuality, that is, I am "this" and not "that," and 3) the realization of

my personal integrity. That is, I am not equivalent to my body or to my soul understood separately. I continue to become more deeply aware of the significance of these facts as I consciously develop my posthuman identity.

My relationships are formed when I distinguish between "me" and "not me." My relationships are not determined through any *a priori* schema imported or imposed from outside of my experience, that is, from any pre-determined idealism, secular or religious. Through my relationships, I am conscious that I exist, not only for myself, but also for others. It is through my relationships with others that my identity occurs. Given my identity, I become aware of myself as an individual. And as an individual, I am able to place myself in an appropriate relationship with objects and living beings of whom I have become conscious and from whom I am differentiated.

I, as a person, do not have the structure of an inanimate object. Rather, I am a being whose constitution is greater than the sum of its individual parts. That is, as an incarnated individual person I am holistically constituted. The fact is that I am devoid of any fixed or final human construction, but not devoid of being perpetually constituted as human as long as I am alive. Being constituted as a human being necessitates a hylomorphic existence, but not necessarily in the Aristotelian understanding.

In a posthuman context through the process of differentiation, which is how I think philosophically, I become conscious of the temporal and the transcendental (metaphysical) aspects of my existence. In short, as a human being, I am a unity of physical and metaphysical components, rather than a union of physical and metaphysical components, which establishes my identity in the presence of God.

Concerning my posthuman identity as an agent in the world this is a question that I have asked myself: Do I critically undertake to construct my future, or do I remain satisfied with my pre-critical status? The real problem is not whether the world will change or whether it will remain the same. The real problem is whether the world will change of its own accord, without my influencing presence, or whether it will be changed deliberately, consciously and with my participation.

While there is no possibility to return to the past, the shaping of my future life-world does require an analysis of the past without re-living it. In analyzing the past, I am conscious of myself, not as a static being, but as an active free agent in the presence of other active free agents within the presence of God. In

constructing my future becoming I have not chosen a traditional philosophical view point, nor any foundation provided by an up-dated classical understanding of human purpose. Rather, I have chosen to look to the future and actualize myself in the present as an agent consciously bring about alternatives to constructing my identity.

In my philosophical musings I have made the same discovery as many philosophers before me. That is, my relation to reality is a self-relation. It was only after I had learned to define my life in terms of consciousness that I came to appreciate the significance of the process by which I had become conscious of my self-relation to reality in the first place. To be conscious of reality is not to interact with it as if it were one of many objects. Reality, which is beyond existential being, is not susceptible to objectification. However, being which is real, can be objectified. That is to say, all being is real, but not all reality is being. To assume that every entity is constituted as a self-contained necessity is to reject the possibility of any dynamic activity and remain within a static Hellenist mind-set. Rather, to be conscious of reality is to differentiate myself within it, by my becoming, by reflecting upon it inwardly and by experiencing it hylomorphically, as a unity of the tangible and the intangible.

In my understanding, then, when I create a "new" life-world and identity it is tantamount to transcending the "old" world. In undertaking a phenomenological approach to interpreting my experience, I have reached a level of self-consciousness and self-creativity that views the Hellenic dichotomy as an option not to be repeated. My consciousness presents itself when distinguishing between "me" and "not-me." That is, I am distinguishable within the physical world of beings, and I distinguish myself to myself as part of the dynamic world of my becoming. As my consciousness is heightened, I continually differentiate myself within my life-world and grow as a person with a unique identity. As I differentiate myself from that which is not myself, my consciousness is also heightened. Thus, I am a self whose identity is disclosed when I differentiate myself from others. I am an entity which comes into being, and whose existence emerges through self-differentiation. In such self-differentiation I am contingent because I make myself "to be" within my environment, that is, I fashion myself creatively. The ultimate result of my consciousness is an awareness of my self-possession. In short, I assign myself an identity.

In creating my becoming, I encounter pre-determined (inherited) categories

to which I assign meaning whether such categories are pre-determined by the nature of the mind, as Kant thought, or by the nature of being, as the pre-Kantian philosophers thought. The truth or error in my understanding depends on the authenticity of the *relationship* between me, as subject, and the other, as object, and not on the accuracy of the intellectual *apprehension* of an object by me as a knowing subject. In short, I have dehellenized truth or error in my thinking.

The term dehellenization is not a negative term. That is, it is not un-hellenization. I experience dehellenization as the conscious creation of my life-world and identity in a non-Hellenic fashion. Within my intellectual history I have come to understand that the task to which philosophy calls me is not the dismantling of traditional metaphysics and the reconstruction of a new metaphysics, but rather the transcending of any metaphysics reflecting dichotomous roots. That is, I have rejected traditional Hellenistic metaphysics in favour of a consciousness that lacks substantive ideals. Thus, I am intellectually living at a non-Hellenistic, posthuman threshold of becoming.

It is understandable that St Thomas thought that the scholastic way of thinking was the only methodological way of thinking given his context. However, I am conscious of the fact that there is no necessary methodology for me to differentiate my becoming within reality and, as well, that no methodology of differentiating within reality is natural or privileged. My world is now one of increasing personal responsibility and my problem is one of finding an appropriate intellectual and philosophical methodology through which I may respond to my old (human) and new (posthuman) experience. A posthuman understanding has the capacity to incorporate my entire person through my senses, emotions, intellect, and will in the act of knowingly being conscious. As a consequence, I am conscious that my contingent human experience is not a total experience. I may overcome this insufficiency, however, via a holistic understanding which allows for something greater. When I incorporate my holistic experience my becoming equates to nothing less than my quest for ultimate meaning. In short, my quest for ultimate meaning is philosophically and theologically tantamount to my identity seeking understanding.

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