

The Origin of the Person

The concept of the person is rooted in theology, not philosophy. Specifically, it's the product of biblical and Patristic thought, not classical metaphysics.

Plato: "person" is impossible, since the soul *isn't* united indissolubly with the individual, reincarnation always being possible.

Aristotle: "person" is impossible, since soul *is* united indissolubly with the body; when the body dies, "(s)he" dies irretrievably.
(Note: in Greek philosophy God is the highest aspect of a continuum of being, but doesn't transcend beings so as to face them and address them.)

Prosopon: in the theatre, the "person" is a mask which has no bearing on the actor's hypostasis or nature. Yet just because of this the actor and the spectator acquire a taste of freedom, since they now have an identity not given them by the world. The tragic dimension is this: to be a "person" is to have something *added* to your being or nature; the "person" *isn't* your true nature; i.e., the mask allows you a role (and therein a measure of freedom) but the role isn't *you*. As a result the "personal" has no ontic status, no ontic reality.

Christian Faith: it freed hk and world from ontological necessity. The Greek Fathers united the person with the being of man. Result: what we call "the person."

Note how the concept of the person in its absolute and ontological content arose from the church's attempt to give philosophical expression to its faith in the Triune God.

Significance: (i) the person isn't an adjunct to being; the person *is* the hypostasis (substance) of being.
(ii) entities no longer trace their being to 'being itself,' but to the person. The person now *is* the being and the constitutive element of beings.

This could only occur a Patristic theology worked out identifying the being of the biblical God with "person." The Father freely begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit, God (as substance) is the *relationship* of Father, Son and Spirit.

God is uncreated person; we are created person, constituted such by God's address. **For both, to be is to be-in-relation.**

The only freedom such being(-in-relation) can exercise is love.
Love (the reciprocity of F, S and Sp) constitutes God's being.

Note the bearing of "person" on death: death is neither alien nor tragic to mere biological processes, but is alien and tragic for us because we are persons. Still, Note Matt. 22:32: "I am the God of Abraham'....He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Only because human being is being-in-communion (-relation) is the human being unique and possessed of an identity. Outside the communion of love the human being would be no more than a thing.

Crucial: insofar as humanism disdains God (*the Person*) it forfeits the human.

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(See Zizioulas, *Being as*