

The International Journal for Field-Being

Relational Metaphysics and Western Non-Substantialism

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IJFB, Vol. 1(1), Part 1, Article No. 4, 2001.

Citation URL: <http://www.iifb.org/ijfb/HHOliver-1-4>

- ¶1. First, a few comments about the title of my paper are in order. The word "and" in the title is consequential, but ambiguous. It could be read conjunctively, hence disjunctively, thus connecting two distinct terms. The late Peter Bertocci, my Personalist colleague at Boston University, was fond of saying that in a title with two nouns connected by "and," more often than not, the word "and" is best understood copulatively: A is B. To the extent that his observation fits my case, the title turns into a claim: relational metaphysics *is* (at least an instance of) Western non-substantialism. Such a claim is certainly intended in the juxtaposition of terms in the title.
- ¶2. The term "relational" is also all too easily misread. In the West, "relational" more often than not designates two things (*res*) *in* relation—relata whose substance is independent of the relation. This is the theory that relations are external. More recently, the theory has been advanced that some relations are external, some internal. On this reading, the subjective relatum is determined by the relatio in a way the objective relatum is not. According to Hartshorne, who implied that his view was shared by Whitehead, the subject is internally related to its object, whereas the object is externally related to its subject. The being of the subject is determined by the object, while the converse does not hold.
- ¶3. In this paper the term "relational" derives its meaning from the theory that all relations are internal. This theory could be stated as follows: the relata are solely and fully determined by the relatio. Even to speak of relata unwittingly suggests a dualistic distinction which could be misconstrued. When relational metaphysics proposes the thesis that "only and all relations are fundamental," this way of stating the position seems to be fostering a "pluralism," so I would hasten to reword it: "relation—relating—is fundamental." This metaphysical claim will be elaborated in the body of the paper.

- ¶4. The second component of the title, "Western Non-Substantialism," provides for us an opportunity to explore neglected elements of the Western philosophical heritage which go against the grain of the dominant schools, Idealism and Realism, by sharply attacking their commitment to the subject-object dichotomy and to the substantialism thereby implied. Many would be willing to admit that non-substantialism is a subordinate element in the Western Tradition, but I maintain that it is a major theme in twentieth century philosophy and physics. In our time the classical options of Western philosophy, Idealism and Realism, have been seriously challenged.
- ¶5. Classically, Idealism and Realism are forms of substance philosophy: Idealism subscribes to the principle that all reality is mental—that reality is Mind; Realism, to the principle that all reality is Material, or in its principal version, that reality consists of the objectively physical. Thus each school is a monism of substance. My former Dean, Walter Muelder, was fond of quoting this brief verbal exchange between idealists and realists: The Idealist refuted the Realist with the quip: "No Matter," to which the Realist retorted: "Never Mind."
- ¶6. I would like, first, to show how Western thought became locked into a choice between these metaphysical options, and then, how the current Western scene requires that it be transcended.

I. The Western Metaphysical Tradition and the Role of Physics in Determining its Character

- ¶7. The *terminus a quo* I have set for examining the Western metaphysical tradition is the beginning of Modern Philosophy. There is little disagreement that Modern Philosophy began with Descartes, whose thought inaugurated Continental Rationalism. By means of Methodic Doubt he found the element of certainty only in the *res cogitans*, and thereafter the problem of uncertainty would reside in the sphere of the *res extensa*. The more firmly Descartes established the certainty of the *Cogito*, the more problematic became the status of the *Cogitatum*. In this way Descartes single-handedly invented the notion of the Modern Subject—an accomplishment which, according to Heidegger, entailed an inversion of the role such terms (notions) as subject and object played in the medieval Schools. Heidegger then proceeded to argue convincingly that Kant's mature philosophy was focused on the problem of the object, more precisely, on "the objectivity of the object." In the first Critique, where Kant struggled with this issue, Idealism became critical—but remained Idealism nonetheless. Kant's success meant that philosophy would thereafter, with notable exceptions, be concerned primarily with the problem of certainty.

- ¶8. This reading of the dynamic underlying the Cartesian-Kantian axis of Modern Philosophy needs further amplification, for between Descartes and Kant lay the foundational work of Newton and Leibniz, both philosophers and physicists. In the late seventeenth century Newton's *Principia* set the stage for Classical Physics. Newton, appealing to his first three laws, or better: axioms, of motion, assumed that Absolute Space and Time were substances; his fourth law, of Universal Attraction, could be read as arguing that Matter was also a substance. With little support from his contemporaries in natural philosophy, Leibniz opposed Newton on all counts: Space and Time were not substances but ideal relations among substances, and Matter was not a substance, but the result of aggregates of simple substances, or Monads. Because it was immediately operational with remarkable consequences, Newton's physics would rule the sciences until the late nineteenth century. One issue on which Newton and Leibniz differed in the famous Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence was cosmology, Clarke (read: Newton) maintaining that the universe had a beginning in time and was located in space. Leibniz, unwilling to assign substantiality to Space and Time, argued that the universe was not located in Space and Time.
- ¶9. What is striking for us is that it was precisely this issue that turned Kant to the task of the Critique of Pure Reason. What Kant in this work called The Antinomies of Pure Reason turn out largely to be the Newton-Leibniz cosmological antitheses. The solution to this dilemma which Kant proposed, namely, "the objective reality in respect of all objects which allow of ever being given to our senses" and the "transcendentality of space and time,"^[1] had the effect of preserving the legacies of Newton and Leibniz, while still operating within the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter.
- ¶10. But it was Newtonian physics which dominated Classical Physics through the nineteenth century. Newtonian physics was translated philosophically into Mechanistic Materialism, for Kant and Laplace both held Newton's laws to be true, though drawing different philosophical conclusions from this assumption. Just as Mechanistic Materialism was beginning to collapse under the weight of serious questions addressed to Newtonian physics in the late nineteenth century, Dialectical Materialism was in its ascendancy.

- ¶11. The Newtonian hegemony in physics suffered major setbacks in the late nineteenth century, and virtually collapsed in 1900 and 1905 with the rise of quantum theory and relativity physics. Since the issues here are too great to trace in all their complexity, I should like to concentrate on the metaphysical question of substance. Einstein could be interpreted as being driven by metaphysical motives. His work in 1905 on the electrodynamics of moving bodies had the effect of removing from physics the assumption that Absolute Space and Absolute Time were (objective) substances. In this paper published in the *Annals of Physics* we find the striking assertion: that "Henceforth space and time no longer have separate reality."[\[2\]](#) His General Theory of Relativity in 1916 removed the ghost of gravitational force from physics. To those left wondering how Leibniz fares in this inversion, the words of Einstein to Bohr bear repeating:
- ¶12. Newton's decision was, in the contemporary state of science, the only possible one, and particularly the only fruitful one. But the subsequent development of the problems, proceeding in a roundabout way which no one could possibly foresee, has shown that the resistance of Leibniz and Huygens, intuitively well founded but supported by inadequate arguments, was actually justified.[\[3\]](#)
- ¶13. Whereas Newtonian physics assumed that Space, Time and (mutually attracting) Matter were substances essential to the practice of physics, Einstein's Entzauberung of these Newtonian "substances" led at least one physicist to conclude that "Physics does not take any particular entities as its subject."[\[4\]](#) Understanding that physics is the study of *properties*, not of any particular entities, has vast philosophical implications.
- ¶14. The same is true for quantum mechanics. My sometime colleague in physics and philosophy at Boston University, Abner Shimony, has often been quoted as saying that the latest findings in quantum theoretical research portend the arrival of the second Golden Age of metaphysics. While this view is not shared by all physicists and philosophers, and all must agree that on the interpretation of quantum phenomena the "jury is still out," philosophy would never be the same after the great quantum debate. Epistemology and metaphysics have been redefined by the interpretation of sub-atomic phenomena. The Copenhagen School made the powerful suggestion—in the words of David Bohm—that the observer and the observed could no longer be separated into subject and object, respectively, for both belong to an "indivisible world." Bohm's personal vision drawn from his lengthy study of the Copenhagen school view is apparent from the following quotation:

- ¶15. The existence of reciprocal relationships of things implies that each "thing" existing in nature makes some contribution to what the universe as a whole is, a contribution that cannot be reduced completely, perfectly and unconditionally, to the effects of any specific set or sets of other things with which it is in reciprocal interconnection. And, *vice versa*, this also means evidently that no given thing can have a complete autonomy in its mode of being since its basic characteristics must depend on its relationships with other things. The notion of a thing is thus seen to be an abstraction, in which it is *conceptually* separated from its infinite background and substructure.[\[5\]](#)
- ¶16. While being careful not to tie the validity of my metaphysical claims to the assumption of the "truth" of the Copenhagen School, I have used Heisenberg's position as a model for a non-substantialist view of reality. Especially significant was his assertion that the path of the electron comes into being when we observe it.

II. Relational Metaphysics as a Non-Substantialist Philosophy

- ¶17. Metaphysics is a generalizing of experience with a view to locating its non-reducible elements. Relational metaphysics locates the fundamentals of experience in relations rather than relata. The simplest assumption one can make about experience is that experience is all there is. And experience consists of relating. The fundamental principle of relationalism is that, given any entitative polarities, reality is to be assigned to the relation. Symbolically: given any entitative aRb, R is what is irreducible.
- ¶18. Examples of entitative polarities are: mind vs. brain, physical vs. mental, God vs. world. Assigning fundamentality to these relata leads to dubious metaphysical conclusions. Western metaphysics has produced numerous examples of systems whose dualisms are the result of making the relata fundamental. Problematic monisms have resulted from assigning reality to one of the relata in an equation. In relational metaphysics the relatio is fundamental, and the relata are derivative. They arise only from reflection on experience. Treating such derivatives as fundamental—as in Aristotelian logic—bifurcates experience into subjects and objects. The negative feature of this operation is the result—says Alfred North Whitehead—of making "quality" dominant over "relatedness."[\[6\]](#) When this has happened, three principal options have arisen:

- ¶19. 1) reality is assigned to the subject, as in Idealism; the predicate is contained in the subject.
 2) reality is assigned to the object, as in Realism; the subject is a function of the predicate.
 3) reality is assigned to both, with a resulting unresolved dualism.
- ¶20. The first option holds that reality is mental. The excesses of this position are well known. Experience arises out of the experiencer, who is thought of as the Cartesian *Cogito*, the Pure Subject, the Absolute Subject, consciousness, Pure Consciousness, etc. The question commonly asked by an Idealist is: How can there be experiencing without an experiencer? The relationalist response to this question is: How can there be an experiencer without experiencing? What possible standing does an experiencer have prior to experiencing?
- ¶21. The second option is the basis of Materialism, in which the subjective is reduced to a function of the objective. The mind in this instance is reduced to an epiphenomenon of the brain. This position is as surely a reductionism as the former. A classic instance of this is when it is argued that the experienced thing precedes the experiencer. It then even becomes conceivable that no experiencer need arise at all! Experience then becomes trivialized.
- ¶22. The third option is a valiant effort to save both elements, but instances of it, such as Russell's view that all relations are external, constitute problematic dualisms. Then the question arises, are these dual elements held together by an underlying reality? Russell's view gave rise to Logical Atomism, which dominated philosophy for a time in this century. Russell's chief opponent was F.H. Bradley who, as an Idealist, opened the modern debate about relations.
- ¶23. In the Appendix to the second edition of his book, *Appearance and Reality*, Bradley championed the thesis that all relations are internal. He argued that:
- ¶24. Nothing in the whole and in the end can be external, and everything less than the Universe is an abstraction from the whole, an abstraction more or less empty, and the more empty, the less self-dependent.[\[7\]](#)
- ¶25. The position of A.C. Ewing, stated some thirty years later, sounds the same note:

- ¶26. The world known by us constitutes a system in which every particular is linked to the rest of the system by a relation of logical entailment. The presence of this relation is obviously incompatible with the extremer forms of pluralism. It implies that the nature of any one thing taken by itself is incomplete and internally incoherent without the whole system on which it depends. Things by their very essence belong together.[\[8\]](#)
- ¶27. The principal American representative of this position in the twentieth century was Brand Blanshard who summarized his position in the expression, "The Coherent World." Chiefly concerned with the intelligibility of the world, Blanshard stated that "[t]he world could be counted intelligible only if it were a system, all inclusive and perfectly integrated, and that such integration would be achieved only if the parts were internally related."[\[9\]](#) His version of the thesis of internal relatedness is that: "A relation is internal to a term when in its absence the term would be different...." This formulation is actually a weaker form of the rigorous claim, that "in the case of no relational property is it true of any term that has not got that property, that it *might* not have had it."
- ¶28. These positions are variant versions of what Charles Hartshorne called "Universal Internality." The view of Russell early on could be called, accordingly, Universal Externality. In the debate over relations, Russell stood alone in advocating the thesis that all relations are external. A view that posed a more serious threat to that of Universal Internality held that some relations are internal, some external. G.E.Moore was the first to articulate this thesis, insisting against Bradley et al., that "[i]t seems quite obvious that in the case of many relational properties which things have, the fact that they have them is *a mere matter of fact*; that the things in question *might* have existed without having them."[\[10\]](#) His recourse to the term "thing" is questionable, but his claim is clear.
- ¶29. The most elaborate statement of the thesis that some, though not all, relations are internal has been provided by Charles Hartshorne. He seems sympathetic to Bradley's position when he states that "Relatedness to the given objects is no addition to the being of that subject...but is that being."[\[11\]](#) But Hartshorne introduces directionality into the thesis when he insists that the object is externally related to the subject. Asymmetry is fundamental to his position, whereas symmetry is characteristic of Universal Internality. In my critique of Hartshorne published earlier I argued that he introduced the notion of asymmetry through the use of modal logic, which he claims is a Logic of Temporality. Furthermore, I do not believe that he is right in claiming Whitehead as an ally in this matter.

- ¶30. In sum, relational metaphysics espouses the thesis of universal internality. While against the background of Western thought this thesis seems like monism, against the background of Eastern thought, it has close affinities with the doctrine of *pratitya samutpada*, of dependent origination. Reality is acting, activity, or to use Professor Tong's term: "articulated activity." Reality is mutuality, or to use his idiom again, "Mutualization."[\[12\]](#)
- ¶31. This position is ontology in the Eastern, but not the usual Western, sense of the term. It is not a substantialism, not a monism of substance. It is more like Jaspers' periechontology, or Heidegger's primal thinking. In terms of the latter, substantialism arose from 'the Forgetfulness of Being.'" The only major Western metaphysical thinker in this century to propose a cosmology fully sympathetic to these overtones was Alfred North Whitehead, though the Process Scholastics have not always been appreciative of this fact. Whitehead was in fact the premier Western thinker who challenged the *erkenntnis-theoretisch* structure of Western metaphysics, which he located in its tendency to prioritize analyticity, bifurcationism and substantialist metaphysics. A representative passage from *Process and Reality* in which he critiques the notion of "an enduring substance" is worthy of our attention:
- ¶32. The simple notion of an enduring substance sustaining persistent qualities, either essentially or accidentally, expresses a useful abstract for many purposes of life. But whenever we try to use it as a fundamental statement of the nature of things, it proves itself mistaken. It arose from a mistake and has never succeeded in any of its applications. But it has had one success: it has entrenched itself in language, in Aristotelian logic, and in metaphysics. For its employment in language and logic, there is...a sound pragmatic defence. But in metaphysics the concept is sheer error. This error does not consist in the use of the word 'substance'; but in the employment of the notion of an actual entity, which is characterized by essential qualities, and remains numerically one amidst the changes of accidental relations and of accidental properties.[\[13\]](#)
- ¶33. In his critique of the Western proclivity for analysis, A.C. Graham highlighted the Chinese alternative, namely, correlative thinking, in which "to explain" means to locate within syntagmatic relations, "while in explaining analytically, attention is diverted from the correlating of concept in the background, but as long as analysis has nothing to put in front, correlative thinking is necessarily in the foreground." As evidence that relational thought is not only a view of reality but a way of viewing reality—of thinking—I cite the significant words of Graham:

- ¶34. The Western tradition...has long persisted in trying to detach the analytic completely from the background in the correlative, dismissing the latter as the loose argument from analogy which we need in practical life, but exclude from strict logic. It is only in the last half-century, with Ryle's exposure of the category mistake, Kuhn's proposal that all science assumes paradigms subverted not by demonstration but by correlative switches, Derrida's uncovering of chains of opposition at the back of logocentric thought, that the West seems finally to be losing faith in its two-thousand-year-old enterprise. [\[14\]](#)

III. The Relational Self

- ¶35. The substantialist view of the self is perhaps the most problematic aspect of substantialism. This note is sounded in Professor Tong's poem, " The Third Eye of Field-Being":
- ¶36. And so you opted for the substantialist's art of self making,
Cutting off all umbilical cords to the Mother of Field-Being.
You first dignify yourself in the kingly robes of an independent entity,
Enthroning yourself in the lonely kingdom of ego-substance.
Then with the projective magic of your subjective substantiality,
You objectify everything on your way to Godlike rigidity.
And with the pointing of the substantializing wand,
A bond was broken, a shade of mutuality has withered and waned.
Now everything becomes merely external and separate from everything else.
External is your objective world, your objectified God, and your objectified self.
Anything you cannot safely possess and control you relegate to the dark side of the Other, the Hell, the objective pole,
And condemned it as illusion, unreal, ugly, or evil.
Oh, in carrying your Godlike rigidity to all eternity (as if you were in fact rigidly eternal),
You, a virtuoso in dualization, have created the most unhappy situation.[\[15\]](#)

- ¶37. From a relational stance, the subject-self, or ego, is an abstraction, a derivative. It is, further, a co-derivative with the object-self or object-thing. In the idiom of Buber, it is the I of I-It, which, as he says, "is different from the I of I-Thou." The issue is ultimately the status of the "other." In the popular mind, "the other" is the non-I—"the other" is what is non-mutual. But I should prefer to argue that "other" means what is mutual. Lacking this mutual dimension, the "other" becomes meaningless. Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, and Buber, in *I and Thou*, delineated Dasein and the I of I-Thou, respectively, precisely by appealing to a mutual definition of otherness.
- ¶38. The concept of God has also suffered from a non-mutual notion of otherness. In mythical consciousness, God is not the Wholly Other, but what is Paradigmatically Other. Hence, the biblical assertion, God is love. God is the Western symbol that mutuality is reality—that the deepest meaning of otherness is mutuality.
- ¶39. Returning to the notion of self, I have argued elsewhere that there is no-self and that it is the relational self. How can we best conceive of this self? One approach is to appeal to the notion of pure experience—a term found in James, Bradley and Nishida. It is the latter whose thought most closely approximates the relational sense of self. Nishida performed a kind of Copernican revolution when he announced: "It is not that there is experience because there are individuals, but rather there are individuals because there is experience." In pure experience there is no prior or posterior, no inner or outer; no experiencer precedes or generates experience. The classic statement on pure experience appeared as the opening lines of Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good*:
- ¶40. To experience is to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by *pure*I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what color or sound might be. In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one directly experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.[\[16\]](#)

¶41. We are fortunate in having available Nishitani's interpretation of Nishida's view of experience, from which the following amplifications of the latter's philosophy of the self is taken:

¶42. To speak of a mind that sees things, a self within that views what is on the outside, does not refer to experience in its pure form but only in a later explanation of experience. In direct experience there is no self, no thing, nothing separate or individual at all. There is only a bond of many things into a single living whole. This is the way it is with what we call the universe or the world.[\[17\]](#)

He continues:

In reality no separate individual things exist on their own. Nor is there any separate, individual self. The only such self is the one we have thought up; nothing in reality is so patterned. What exists in reality is at one with the Life of the universe. This view may seem to leave us out of the picture altogether, but it only means that in our looking and listening the activities of looking and listening have emerged somewhere from the depths of the universe, Our looking and listening and all other things we do issue from a point where all things form a single living bond. This is why these activities are united with all sorts of other things and why we cannot think in terms of things existing on the outside and a mind existing on the inside. This is a later standpoint; the prior standpoint is that of pure experience where subject and object are one and undifferentiated.[\[18\]](#)

¶43. In view of the Western habit of insisting on the necessary relation between the enduring self and moral accountability, there is another aspect of Nishida's notion of pure experience that has relational importance: it is that in pure experience there is "not the slightest interval between the intention and the act." Every action is a unity indivisible into temporal stages. I have argued elsewhere that the Western suspicion of this claim is rooted in Augustine's "temporalization of the will." It was he who first established the paradigm separating intention from act—a move that required a morality of intention separate from the morality of the act. It is the enduring basis of Western moralism—a phenomenon missing in bodies of Christianity undetermined by Augustine, such as Eastern Orthodoxy.

- ¶44. I refer to Nishida and Nishitani, not because they were influential upon my own formulation of the relational notion of the self nor because there are no Western parallels. But they strike me as having set forth the purest version of the non-substantialist view of selfhood. There are Western thinkers whom I could have quoted at some length, most notably Ludwig Feuerbach and Martin Buber, who successfully proffered non-substantialist views of the self. I even argued early on that Feuerbach created a relational philosophy on the basis of a phenomenological investigation of self and other. The following excerpt from Feuerbach makes the point:
- ¶45. "I" is only a linguistic ellipse, that, merely for brevity's sake, leaves out half of what is understood.[\[19\]](#)
- ¶46. The sense of this, from another context, is that "where there is no *thou*, there is no *I*." Buber elaborated upon this suggestion in his I-Thou philosophy which is clearly relational. For him, the unitive reality of I-Thou is the Between. Basic in Buber's schema is a distinction between Self-Other and Self-and-Other. Self-Other, that is, I-Thou, is an indivisible unity; Self-and-Other, I-It, is a duality. I-Thou is relational reality; I-It is an abstraction.
- ¶47. There is an aspect of selfhood which Heidegger calls "Jemeinigkeit (mineness)" and which must be accounted for in any viable doctrine of the self. A clue to its meaning for Heidegger lies in his equation of "Dasein" and "Anwesenheit," or presence. Nishida would probably have regarded this notion of "mineness" as potentially "impure," because of the all too human proclivity for reifying all such distinctions. Even Nishitani admits that Nishida's notion of pure experience in *An Inquiry into the Good* was "entirely subjective," yet hastens to add that it does not entail the "dichotomy of subject and object or of mind and matter." The equivalent of Heidegger's notion of "mineness" in Nishida's thesis on pure experience is to be found in his claim that—in Nishitani's words—"I am myself present in what is going on... the scene and my own presence there are the same thing."[\[20\]](#)

IV. Western Theology and Non-Substantialism

- ¶48. No consideration of Western thought would be adequate which did not give serious attention to theology, or Christian thought. While it is true that the mainstream of Western theology has fostered substantialism, there are notable examples of non—even anti-substantialist theologians. Arguably the most impressive example of such is Meister Eckhart, the Rhineland mystic. Indeed, so much has been written about Eckhart by theologians, historians and philosophers that it is rare to find an educated person who is unfamiliar with at least some elements of his distinctive theology. The philosophers of the Kyoto School have frequently appealed to his unique brand of thinking, finding therein some affinities with their Oriental heritage. In fact, one of the greatest monographs on Eckhart—in my opinion—is Shizuteru Ueda's Marburg dissertation.
- ¶49. Eckhart's pure non-substantialism has never entered the mainstream of Christian thought, and has often been branded an aberration. Nevertheless, for many of us he stands as a worthy alternative to the problematic version of God and the self in mainline Catholic and Protestant thought. Even so, he adhered to the Roman version of the doctrine of the Trinity primarily associated with Augustine, however much he rejected the latter's version of the self.
- ¶50. Less well known to Westerners is the intellectual legacy of Eastern Orthodox Christianity whose debate with Rome centered on the issue of substantialism. Contrary to the Western doctrine of the Trinity with its emphasis on (*una*) substantia, the Eastern doctrine emphasized the Person of God (as in *tres personae*). While the West tended to view this as dangerously close to tritheism in some instances, the East regarded the West as dangerously perched on the precipice of essentialism. By developing some suggestions made by some of his fellow Orthodox thinkers, John Zizioulas has convincingly shown that in Orthodoxy—contrary to the West—God is viewed personally, communally, relationally. His notable volume announces that the Being of God is Communion.^[21] Admittedly, not all contemporary Orthodox theologians are happy with Zizioulas' thesis, but there is no doubt that he has highlighted the essential difference of Orthodoxy theology from Roman Catholic dogma. And he has gone on to show that different versions of selfhood issue from these antithetic doctrines of the Trinity. Marios Begzos, in a little known article on "Apophaticism in Eastern Christian Theology," first quotes the late Nissiotis as follows:

- ¶51. "Orthodox existentialism" has nothing to do with the individualism of *existentialia*...[but] signifies the transition from the individual (*pro me*) to the person (*pro nobis*).

And then adds:

Apophatic theology marks the transition from individuum to relationality, and thus the polarity between subjectivism and objectivism is in principle *aufgehoben*. Apophaticism means, finally, intersubjectivity, i.e. communal and mutual knowledge.[\[22\]](#)

- ¶52. The Orthodox heritage is rich in philosophical insights, but one in particular should be of special interest to Oriental and Occidental scholars. It is the doctrine of perichoresis, or the mutual interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity. They are said to be "distinct but not separate." I am of the conviction that this is a new category of relationship, applicable to a wide variety of cases. The I [and] Thou of 'I-Thou' are distinct but not separate. Self and world are distinct but not separate. God and the world are distinct but not separate. Perhaps God, self and world are distinct but not separate. The One and the Many are distinct but not separate. Perhaps, Being and Non-Being are distinct but not separate.
- ¶53. I should like to conclude with a few generalizations. First, I have tried to show that the "substantialist" West is rich in relational, non-substantialist insights, however much they have played background roles. Second, there is good evidence for the hope that the West is on the threshold of a mandatory rethinking of its substantialist commitments, as for example, in Modern Physics, and the rise of bold new correlative theories. Third, the West could benefit from a deeper consideration of its own representatives who have attracted the most attention from non-Western thinkers, for they have demonstrated their capacity to serve as bridges between diverse cultures. And lastly, this relational metaphysics was first proposed for consideration primarily by Westerners as an example of a non-substantialism drawn wholly from Western sources, although later I brought it into closer relation with relevant Eastern thought.

END NOTES

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ISSN 1548-6001

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