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Unmasking the Person

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> "The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks."
>
> —OSCAR WILDE[1]

In the movie *Ocean's Twelve* (2004) Julia Roberts plays two roles. Her principal role as Tess is to play an unknown woman who happens to look like the celebrity Julia Roberts. In the film Tess even presents herself on one occasion as the real-world actress Julia Roberts in order to gain the privileges of celebrity. In the same film Julia Roberts also plays the real Julia Roberts, whose presence undermines the credibility of the impersonator. In one and the same film, then, Julia Roberts plays herself and someone playing herself. She is both masked and unmasked. Such a juxtaposition, like a Shakespearean play-within-a-play, calls attention to the difference between an actor and a character and to the context in which such a difference can occur. When we think about such things, the very nature of the person as the agent and as the dative of such contexts rises to the fore. This need not be surprising, for it was the difference in context afforded by the theater that first enabled human beings to come to terms with the person. Attention to the role of context, especially in art, will allow us to re-animate the classical understanding of the human being as a person, a wearer of masks, bearing a face, who navigates contexts to act and speak truthfully, duplicitously, or simply playfully. Our goal is to turn the person inside out: to avoid the perils of Cartesian and Lockean introspection by showing how the person is on display in an encounter. To

[1] "The Truth of Masks: A Note on Illusion" in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. J. B. Foreman (New York NY: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 1078.

be a person is not principally to be a consciousness; to be a person is to be endowed with a face through which we encounter a world and one another.

Our inquiry first discusses film and stage as the context in which personhood originally emerges. The actor masks his own identity and thoughts so as to reveal a character. What is masked is nothing other than the person. Secondly, we remove the mask to revisit the Greek emphasis on the face and the Latin emphasis on speech. We establish their interplay in putting the person on display. The eyes in particular are revelatory of the person and serve as a kind of locus for speech and self-disclosure. The final section highlights the role of context for personal unveiling. Offstage, the person conceals himself in an improper context and reveals himself in a proper one. Concealing protects persons from being regarded impersonally, and it invites a personal regard. The specific contributions of this study, then, are the following: recovering the context in which the person becomes manifest, integrating and amplifying the classical emphasis on face and speech as essential dimensions of the person, and identifying the personal significance of context.

MASKS CONCEAL TO REVEAL

All acting involves a revealing that simultaneously conceals. An actor wears a mask, dons a costume, assumes a persona, and thereby reveals a character. In this revelation of a character, however, the actor himself simultaneously withdraws: "To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim."[2] We who watch the film no longer see Julia Roberts but Tess. A peculiar cancellation occurs in the unusual event in which an actress plays herself. When Julia Roberts appears in a film we expect her to appear as someone else, but when she appears as herself we cancel that expectation. Still, because she appears in the world of the film, she is not, strictly speaking, Julia Roberts but

[2] Wilde, "The Picture of Dorian Gray," in *Complete Works*, p. 17.

Julia Roberts playing "Julia Roberts." Her identity transcends the context of the film, but her thoughts and actions are bound to the world of the film.

What occurs in acting has an analogue in painting.[3] We see though do not focus on the material bearer of the image (the canvas, the paint, etc.) but on the image, and if it is representational, on the object of the image. As a viewer, we can shift attention from bearer, to image, to object depicted, but normally and naturally the bearer recedes for the sake of the image of the object. When we view van Gogh's *Starry Night*, we primarily see the swirling sky and only secondarily the layers of paint and canvas. Similarly, on screen or on stage we do not see the actress but the character she plays. The actress recedes for the sake of her character, though it is possible for us to pay attention to what has receded. When we see a musician play an instrument, our focus undoubtedly shifts to the song and away from the musician, but the musician himself does not wholly withdraw from view. Not so with an actress who must wholly become the character. The actress is the medium herself.

Nietzsche suggests that all art is a lie, and that the concealing of the actor for the sake of the character is a deception, albeit one that is not intended to deceive.[4] But if it is not intended to deceive, it is not a lie at all. The difference between acting and lying is one of context. It is not a lie in the context of a film or stage, but only when it occurs off-stage in the context of everyday life. For example, consider the difference between someone showing up at your door playing an IRS agent and someone appearing on television or on stage as an IRS agent. Even if you are also an actor on the stage, the actor playing the agent is not being duplicitous. He may play a character

[3] Hans Jonas argues that the ability to make and intend images is distinctively human. A cave drawing, then, is definitive evidence for the presence of the human being. Similarly, we are arguing that making an image of oneself as actor or agent is distinctive of the person. See *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 157-75.

[4] "How is it that art is only possible as a lie?" he asks. "Art includes the delight of awakening belief by means of surfaces. But one is not really deceived! [If one were,] then art would cease to be." "Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" in *Philosophy and Truth: Selection from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 1979), § 184.

duplicitously pretending to be an IRS agent, but he is not lying by virtue of acting. To see or be in a film or play is to enter a new context, and this shift in context alters the way appearances are to be taken.

Such a context is not established simply by appearing on screen or stage. An actress could appear on a DVD extra discussing her role, or she could appear on a televised awards program, or she could come out on stage after her performance to receive applause not for the character but for her performance. In such cases we see the actress, we see Julia Roberts, not the character she plays. Although she appears on screen or on stage, in these cases, she is not playing "Julia Roberts." Rather, she simply is Julia Roberts.[5]

In *Notting Hill* (1999) Roberts plays a famous actress named Anna Scott. She meets and falls in love with a no-name bookstore owner played by the famous actor Hugh Grant. Simultaneously, the viewer is asked to regard Roberts as a famous actress, though not her real self, and to regard Grant as an utterly unknown person. The movie even amplifies the contrast by introducing Alec Baldwin as Scott's boyfriend. In such juxtaposition, suppression, and piecemeal borrowing, the passive viewer or spectator is still exercising rationality and keeping the contexts straight. Such activity is not only required by film but by other endeavors as well. Sports games likewise function in terms of players in a context, marked off by the lines on the fields. The boundaries establish a new context in which players can play, in which the rules of the game hold. Without such a context a baseball player cannot play ball. Athletes do not conceal their identities and true thoughts in order to be ball players, but they do need to set aside their usual concerns and enter into the context of the game with its rules and purposes. They become pitchers, batters, and outfielders, something that can occur only within the game. Consider what occurs when the

[5] "Even I want to be Cary Grant," Cary Grant reportedly said. Actors often take stage names and do adopt a persona. But such things belong to real life, not to the world of film.

difference in context is forgotten. During a professional baseball game I attended, the home plate umpire died of a heart attack. Because it happened on the field, many fans responded as if the event were simply a bad play or a bad call. Boos and jeers followed when the game was suspended and then canceled. These fans failed to distinguish between the context of sport and the context of real life. The players themselves, however, better understood. As one manager reported, "Nobody wanted to play after seeing something like that happen."[6]

Ordinary language distinguishes between the secondary contexts of such things as film, stage, and sports from the primary context by calling the latter "real life." So-called reality TV ostensibly takes place in the primary context. The justly parodied drug commercial, which presented an actor saying, "I am not a doctor, but I play one on TV," illustrates an absurd conflation of the two contexts. We would trust the medical advice he gives his patients in the context of the television program, but not in the context of our own lives. When it comes to our health, no impersonator will do; we want a real doctor. What firmly plants us in the primary context of real life, then, is our own mortal flesh. It is here that we suffer needs, desires, and joys, and here that we can die. Here, too, we can reveal ourselves to each other. No virtual world can claim this final horizon, this primary context of being.

PERSONHOOD UNMASKED

What name shall we give the peculiar creature of contexts, a creature who hides himself to reveal another, an action whose meaning depends on context? The ancients termed the mask wearer a "person." Viewing the actor on stage donning a mask and revealing a character, they gained a precious insight into the nature of the person. In the context of the stage, the actor reveals

[6] John McSherry died during the Reds' season opener on April 1, 1996. The quotation is from the Reds' manager, Ray Knight. See "Umpire Dies after Collapsing on Field," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1996, p. B7.

a character by wearing a mask. In the context of real life, it is the person who, endowed with a face, acts and speaks truthfully or not. In view of the above considerations, can we re-animate this ancient theme?

Both the Greek *prósopon* and the Latin *persona* target complementary aspects of the person.[7] Mask arises as the first meaning. From there the Greek emphasizes the look or face of the human being; the root *óps* comes from the verb to see and be seen. What the mask masks is the face, which indicates the unique status of the human being amidst his animal counterparts: only he is endowed with a face, the revealer of meaning.[8] The Latin extends mask, *persona*, by emphasizing the activity of speech. *Personare* means to sound or speak through. Naturally, it came to denote the dramatic character, then the forms of address (first, second, and third person), then a legal status, and finally the human substance. While Greek emphasizes the face as the meaningful display of the person, Latin emphasizes speech and communication. Both conspire to highlight the special dignity of the human being, but they do so in such a way that they point to two complementary features of that dignity.

There are similarities in structure and function between the fronts of the higher animals and humans, but the human alone can mask herself, her emotions, her thoughts, and appear other than she is. The animal is transparent. If it is excited, fearful, or upset, we can easily tell. "Countenance," which derives in part from the Latin to restrain or to hold together, suggests the peculiarly human ability to modulate just what is on display and how we act in accord with the

[7] For the etymology of the term "person," see *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Rittler, s.v. "*Person*," and Boethius, "A Treatise against Eutyches and Nestorius" in *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Steward and E. K. Rand, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 84-91. I am particularly indebted to Kenneth Schmitz's excellent essay that explores the philosophical significance of the etymology. See "The Geography of the Human Person," reprinted in *The Texture of Being: Essays in First Philosophy*, ed. Paul O'Herron (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2007), pp. 149-67.

[8] Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 491b9-11.

demands of the situation. There is an important element of freedom in the face. A consequence of the freedom to conceal is the freedom to reveal in the proper context.

Face has a dual significance. When we face something, we freely turn our attention to it.[9] We may need encouragement if it is an uncomfortable truth that we would rather ignore. "Face the facts," we say, to encourage fortitude in matters of truth. What we propose is that persons turn their attention to the matter and acknowledge it.[10] Similarly, when we face others we turn our attention to them. We tell others to look at us when we are speaking because the eyes embody attention the most. When we make eye contact, our attentions join and we face the world together. Here we do not look *at* the other's eye, but *with* them. We do not adopt the gaze of the anatomist, but the personal look of attention. Such a look says, "I see you seeing me" or "you see me seeing you" and "together we are considering the same thing." The eyes remind us that we are dealing with another agent of truth, another person, and it is much more difficult to speak vaguely or insincerely when we are making eye contact. The person is that which faces the world in the twofold sense of being responsive to the truth and of being there for others.

With our face we open upon a world but our own face is self-effacing. The face, like the back, is absent from my awareness, except through kinesthesia or pain. Unlike the back, however, the face is present to my awareness through the encounter with another face. As I express myself I am on display, and I see my face in the response of the other's face to my facial expressions. The expressions of my face can be natural or self-conscious. They are not expressions to me but to the other I face. I am masked to myself but unmasked to another. The absence of my face is related to the inability of the eyes to see their own act of seeing. Even a mirror image shows my eye only by

[9] In this way St. Thomas Aquinas underscores the unique character of the human face. Other animals are exclusively oriented downward toward food and reproduction, but the human being faces upward toward the beauty and truth of things. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 91, a. 3 ad 3.

[10] Gabriel Marcel's Gifford Lectures explore this tendency to turn from uncomfortable truths. See "Truth as a Value" in *Mystery of Being*, vol. 1, trans. G. S. Fraser (South Bend IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), pp. 57-76.

making it still. When I see the movement of another's eyes, by contrast, I see something of his seeing, something of his attention. Amplified by facial expressions, I see something of the person himself.

I would like to highlight what is peculiar about the eyes. They recapitulate the surface and depth of the face. They are recessed from the brow, and their very structure embodies further concatenations of surface and depth. Lids border the eyes and reveal the glassy surface of the eye itself. Light reflects off the eye, which is further differentiated between the surface of its white background and the depth of the iris and pupil. In this way the eye naturally achieves the play of surface and depth artificially achieved by the icon, which uses gold foil to create a lit surface from which the figures recede into a depth. The eyes, as the very center of the face, embody its surface and depth, and thereby can serve as the locus for speech and self-revelation. Framed by the brows and the lips, the eyes come alive as expressive of the person. A raised brow, a knowing wink, a wry smile, or a slight frown reveals much, and the range of subtle shifts of expression is remarkable. Moreover, the eyes' saccadic movement and constant searching motion reveal the restlessness of the person who ranges her attention over the world by considering present and absent things as well as the good of herself and others. The eyes and the face as a whole reveal the person.

To gaze into another's eyes is to encounter the mystery of another person. I advisedly use the word "mystery," not to mystify the reality but to underscore that the person is given as veiled, and this is the mode proper to self-revelation. In this respect "veiling" is different than "masking," which uses the surface to completely hide the depth; the veil reveals the depth as a depth. Through the surface of the face, another is revealed to me as another depth, and through this surface, I likewise encounter the surface of my own face in which I aim to reveal my depth. Etymologically, "mystery" comes from the Greek "*múein*," meaning to close one's eyes or mouth. Closing eyes

and mouth reduces the face to mere surface. Mystery then carries recognition of depth and suggests that there is more in the face than just surface alone. One husband says of his wife, "Sometimes, when we're lying together, I look at her and I feel dizzy with the realization that here is another distinct person from me, who has memories, origins, thoughts, feelings that are different from my own. That tension between familiarity and mystery meshes something strong between us."[11] The realization of depth occurs when he looks at her, and he is presumably looking upon her face. The person, then, is not a thing-in-itself lurking behind the mere surface, nor is the person a mere phenomenon, pure surface. The person eschews these simplistic alternatives because the person is a depth being revealed. In the face the person is on display in a continual unveiling.

In this way I would like to distinguish the face as expression from the face taken as means of recognition or reminiscence. Someone's face allows us to distinguish them from others. Government documentation often requires photo identification, and we carry portraits of loved ones with us. Such a snapshot is different from the face as unveiling. In the latter, but not the former, we can encounter another and reveal ourselves to another through conversation and action. As Wittgenstein observes, "Expression could be said to exist only in the play of the features."[12] The identity of the person is static, but the personal unveiling of expression is not. Occupying an intermediate place between identification and expression is the moving picture of film or stage. Here we merely witness others but do not encounter them. We can recognize them as persons and see them expressing themselves to others, but we do not encounter them nor do we come to an experience of our own faces. Surface alone suffices for recognition, but the surface yields depth in the unveiling characteristic of an encounter.

[11] Barack Obama in 1996 on his wife, Michelle, http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2009/01/sacre-bleu-le-m.html, accessed March 25, 2009.

[12] *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 2, ed. G. H. Von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue (Chicago IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 67.

Our voice comes forth through and with our faces. We speak about things, events, plans, hopes, fears, and such. But we also address one another as "you" and appropriate our own selves with the pronouns "I" and "we." As Sokolowski has so carefully brought out, we can use "I" in such a way that we indicate our own activity as agents of truth: we say things such as this: "*I think that* such and such is the case."[13] We do not merely assert the fact; we assert ourselves as asserting the fact. We include ourselves as that to whom such a truth has been manifested; we include ourselves as the one responsible for that truth. Human speech in general is saturated with syntactical structure and so stands in contrast with animal communication.[14] Animals can signify things like fear or hunger, some can even employ simple sign language, but, lacking syntax, they cannot embed meaning in structural wholes. A person can give a speech, tell a joke, ask for alms, and hear these things with understanding. By virtue of speech the person is the political animal and can be a subject of laws, rights, and obligations. He or she can enter into a contract. He or she can also make and keep a promise or a vow. Through speech, a whole new possibility of communion opens up, and we can share in things absent, such as memories or common purposes. I can bid you recall something we both experienced, or I can tell you what happened to me or what I hope will happen for the both of us.

From the same point of departure in the mask, the Greek emphasis on face and the Latin emphasis on speech highlight interwoven features of personal being. Speaking and listening occur within the context of our facing the world and each other. Conversation is best face-to-face where it is much more probable that we will be giving and be given full attention and that we will understand and be understood. To look upon the face of another is to see a person who can be

[13] Robert Sokolowski, *The Phenomenology of the Human Person* (New York NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 10-30.

[14] See Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, 16a1-17a7; Derek Bickerton, *Language and Human Behavior* (Seattle WA: Univ. of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 11-40; and Sokolowski, pp. 35-44.

addressed and approached in a personal way. To face and to speak are interdependent. Without language, without the ability to say "I" and "you" or the ability to speak truly, the human face would be little different from that of any other higher mammal. Without a face, without the ability to encounter another and the world, language would remain an abstraction, anonymously spoken and addressed without responsibility.

PERSONHOOD MASKED

It is instructive to compare the rich account of the person coming from the classical tradition with its modern counterpart. We ask of Descartes: "Does the thinking thing (*res cogitans*) have a face?" The thinking thing is the target of a purely introspective gaze and as such there is no face. The thinking thing is purely inward and is not on display to others and so speech is reduced to pure thought. Moreover, the body only enters into the reflections as an extended thing (*res extensa*), as a mathematically representable surface. The body's face is only physiological; better still it is not a face at all, but instead nothing more than a mask. What appears is sheer surface.[15] Our contemporary substitute for the thinking thing, the brain, does not have a face either, and no careful scrutiny of its neural networks will reveal a face lurking within them.[16] I can only

[15] And yet Descartes's *Passions of the Soul* betrays some difficulty in the reduction of the eyes and face to mere surface, for they clearly signify the body's passions. "But although it is easy to perceive such expressions of the eyes and to know what they signify, it is not easy to describe them. For each consists of many changes in the movement and shape of the eye, and these are so special and slight that we cannot perceive each of them separately though we can easily observe the result of their conjunction." *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 367-68. What is true of the eyes also holds for the face as a whole, and Descartes further observes that the face can both reveal and conceal the body's passions. "And in general the soul is able to change facial expressions, as well as expressions of the eyes, by vividly feigning a passion which is contrary to one it wishes to conceal. Thus we may use such expressions to hide our passions as well as reveal them." Ibid., p. 368. Two comments are in order. First, Descartes thinks our facial expressions signify but do not display our passions. Second, the thinking thing itself is not signified but only the passions of the body.

[16] John Searle provides a vivid representation of this physicalist picture: "Each of our beliefs must be possible for a being who is a brain in a vat because each of us is precisely a brain in a vat; the vat is a skull and the 'messages' coming in are coming in by way of impacts on the nervous system." *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of*

encounter someone's brain through dissection or surgery, and the exposed brain is only one of many organs. Brain imaging does not reveal a person but only regions of activity in the brain, and we must rely on the testimony of the subject to correlate the activity to anything personally significant. Neither the thinking thing nor the brain has a face, because the face yields to neither introspection nor objectification. I find no face in my thoughts. My own face does not show up directly in experience, and the face of another ceases to be a face for me as soon as I regard it as an object. Not as a material thing made up of skin, muscle, blood vessels, bone, and cartilage does the face convey meaning, but only as an expressive whole.[17] Neither Cartesian dualism nor contemporary physicalism can account for the face, the fact that we are on display, not as specimens, but as persons.

Among contemporary philosophic voices, Emmanuel Levinas is exemplary for calling attention to the face as the privileged locus of the person. Levinas struggles to break free of the immanence of modern subjectivity by emphasizing the radical alterity of the person encountered.[18] The person appears in the face not as a phenomenon, when that is understood as measured against the modern subject, nor as an indication, when that means that the face merely points to something absent:

> The face presents itself in its nudity; it is neither a form concealing but thereby indicating a ground, nor a phenomenon that hides but thereby betrays a thing itself. Otherwise, the face would be one with a mask, but a mask presupposes a face. If signifying were equivalent to indicating, the face would be insignificant.[19]

Mind (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), p. 230. Encased within the skull, "we" are decidedly not on display to each other or to ourselves.

[17] See Schmitz, p. 152.

[18] "The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me--and this is its very nudity. It *is* by itself and not by reference to a system." *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1969), p. 75. Similarly, Wittgenstein writes, "...it is as if the human face were in a way translucent and that I were seeing it not in reflected light but rather in its own." *Remarks*, p. 33.

[19] "Meaning and Sense" in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996), p. 60.

The face is the significant revelation of the person as irreducibly foreign to my subjectivity. Levinas exalts the face of the foreign other for whom I am responsible, but he does not pay attention to the curious fact that my own face in which I abide is absent from my own sight, though it is present to another. In the face of the other I have my own face given to me. I too have a face, and I am on display to them. The moment of dialogue and the responsibility it engenders is due to the fact that both of us have faces.

By emphasizing face and speech I do not wish to obscure the importance of our embodied perception and its nascent sense of self. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty has shown, such a sense of self orients us within the world.[20] Nor do I wish to overlook the felt bodily sense of self that Michel Henry has identified as primordial life itself.[21] For when we encounter a person in the face and speech of another--thereby encountering our own selves--our tacit sense of self, given in bodily affectivity, achieves manifestation. The other person, whose surface displays a depth, contextualizes our own depth by revealing its surface. Our depth is not mere interiority but rather an inwardness that is also outward. Such depth is rooted in desire and bodily affectivity, and encountering another and their affectivity continually contextualizes it. Neither Merleau-Ponty nor Henry fully breaks out of the first-person perspective inaugurated by Descartes. The task is not to deny ourselves by adopting a third-person perspective but to appreciate the way we have ourselves through the encounter with another. Through "you" I can discover the face of my "I." To be a person means not just to see and to speak but to be seen and to be addressed.

A real-life example may serve to illustrate the priority of the other face in my coming to have my own. In *The Mascot* Alex Kurzem relates his experience as a Jewish boy in an area of Russia under Nazi-control. At one point he is about to be shot by Nazi soldiers, but he makes eye

[20] *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London UK: Routledge Classics, 2002).

[21] See, for instance, *Material Phenomenology*, trans. Scott Davidson (Bronx NY: Fordham Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 120-34.

contact with one of them and asks for something to eat: "At that moment my eyes met the eyes of one of the soldiers, the one who appeared to be in charge.... I ran toward him, exclaiming defiantly, 'Bread! Give me bread!'"[22] By this expression of affectivity, of sensibility, the very face of the boy took on a depth that had been denied it before. The good soldier, the one with "warm eyes," chose to protect the boy by hiding his Jewish identity, and this decision was occasioned by the boy's voicing his desire for food. By being addressed, the soldier discovered his own face, his own responsibility.[23] He faced the uncomfortable truth, and his own bodily affectivity took on renewed significance as he voluntarily risked his life to protect the boy's. The Jewish boy became the mascot of the Nazi troops and even appeared in a Nazi propaganda film. He wears a mask and dons a character to protect his face, a face glimpsed by the soldier with warm eyes, a soldier who found the significance of his own face, his own eyes, in the encounter with the boy's.

PERSONHOOD IN CONTEXT

Along with the Greek emphasis on face and the Latin emphasis on speech, I would like to bring out something implicit in their experience but not made explicit: To be a person is to be a creature of contexts. A person views and distinguishes actors and characters, honesty and duplicity, public and private, and acts accordingly to reveal or protect as the context demands. The ability to present oneself as other than one is has the positive value of protecting the vulnerability of the person from prying eyes. Personal details are not disclosed even when prompted. Such

[22] Mark Kurzem, *The Mascot: Unraveling the Mystery of My Jewish Father's Nazi Boyhood* (New York NY: Viking Penguin, 2007), p. 58. He continues, "I don't know what prompted me to do it--something much more than hunger, I suspect."

[23] Levinas points out that the responsibility enkindled by such an encounter serves to enhance the one responsible: "The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity--its hunger--without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness." *Totality and Infinity*, p. 200.

disclosures are reserved for the intimacy of friends.[24] The public realm can serve as the setting for action, deliberation, and solidarity, but it does not naturally lend itself to intimate personal disclosure.

To be a person is to be attentive not only to what appears but also to what, tellingly, does not. In the context of the stage, the actor conceals himself for the sake of revealing a character. In the context of real life, the actor conceals himself from the paparazzi as a means of protection. In some cultures the veil of the bride functions similarly. Only within the proper context, namely, the interpersonal commitment of life-long fidelity, is the face unveiled, because only in such a context can the inward dignity be protected, appreciated, and not downgraded into a mere surface. The veil or clothing in general protects the person not only from the elements but also from an impersonal gaze. In such a gaze one could say, we "lose face."[25] The viewer absents himself from an encounter in which he himself is likewise vulnerable. Instead the viewer acts as spectator, forcing the revealing self onto the theater stage where she can only be a character. The tabloid, for instance, delights in making a celebrity into a spectacle. The surface is not taken as it is meant to be, a revelation of self, but is made a superficial amusement. Under the threat of the impersonal gaze, each of us exercises discretion over what we reveal to others as a means of self-protection. We withhold personal details, hopes, and dreams, and our deepest loves from those whom we deem indifferent to our true good. Such a veil, like the actor's mask, conceals to reveal, but what is revealed is not something other than the person, but the person herself. Veiling shows that one is a

[24] On the qualitative difference between privacy and intimacy, see Schmitz, pp. 160-61.

[25] Phenomenological philosophers as diverse as Max Scheler, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Karol Wojtyła have described the experience of something personal becoming disclosed outside its proper context as "shame." This has nothing to do with guilt or feeling remorse over having done something bad. Instead it is the feeling of being exposed to the uncharitable gaze of others. For instance, Sartre writes, "Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is, of *recognizing myself* in this degraded, fixed, and dependent being which I am for the Other." *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York NY: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 288. Wojtyła has developed the way in which people, in the context of betrothed love, can be naked without shame, because they are not reduced to the status of an object. *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 1993), pp. 174-93. Naturally, the theme reappears in the context of his theology of the body.

person; unveiling shows one to be the person one is. The price of access to the intimacy of unveiling is the mutuality of self-unveiling characteristic of friendship or love.

Hiding oneself from an impersonal gaze is a good of the person. Such a hiding is not a lying or deception but a protection. Even Kant, who rejected lying in any circumstances, nonetheless recognized the importance of appearing other than you think or feel: decorum and modesty invite respect, politeness and compliments invite friendship.[26] Such concealment of one's own thoughts and passions are justified because they do not deceive and because they lead to the virtues of intimacy: "this is precisely why they do not *deceive*, because everyone knows how they should be taken, and especially because these signs of benevolence and respect, though empty at first, gradually lead to real dispositions of this sort."[27]

The ability to conceal oneself in an improper context and reveal oneself in a proper context is a power latent in personhood as such. I think it also has an important role in ethics and in taking on new roles. We deliberately act like something we inwardly are not as yet and thereby become the very thing we were pretending to be. If you want to be virtuous but are not, play the part of the virtuous agent. If you find yourself a father or a mother, strive to play the part as it should be played, not as your exhausted and selfish self desires. If you do, you will become the person you aspire to be.[28] "Fake it till you make it," counsels Alcoholics Anonymous. Merely appearing excellent, provided one strives to realize the appearance, is better than sincerely being mediocre.

[26] Decorum wards off over-familiarity: "Good, honorable *decorum* is an external illusion that instills *respect* in others (so that they do not behave over familiarly with others)." *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. and trans. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), p. 43. Modesty wards off becoming a sexual object: "But *modesty* (*pudicitia*), a self-constraint that conceals passion, is nevertheless very beneficial as an illusion that brings about distance between one sex and the other, which is necessary in order that one is not degraded into a mere tool for the other's enjoyment." Ibid, p. 45.

[27] Ibid., p. 44.

[28] Kant rightly observes, "For when human beings play these roles, eventually the virtues, whose illusion they have merely affected for a considerable length of time, will gradually really be aroused and merge into the disposition." Ibid., p. 42.

Naturally, this advice stands in contrast to Machiavelli, who counsels us to appear other than we are and not to aspire to such apparent excellence and virtue.[29] Contemporary Machievellians are not hard to find. A food book, for instance, happily advises its readers "how to be truly greedy without appearing so."[30] When we simply play a part, we conflate art and life. We fulfill Nietzsche's grim description of the human animal as engrossed in the masks of vanity.[31] Nothing less is at stake than the person as such. Kierkegaard cautions that the habitual mask-wearer's gap between surface and depth can render true self-revelation impossible, lead to a sudden and indiscreet self-disclosure, or dissolve the mask-wearer into a chaos of characters. These effects foreclose the possibility of happiness: "But he who cannot reveal himself cannot love, and he who cannot love is the most unhappy man of all."[32] At issue in the display of our faces and speech is our own selves and the possibility of intimacy. The ability to act is a potent force in shaping and protecting the person. There is a danger, however, that the ability to act, rather than being an ally for the person's revelation in the proper context, could foreclose the very possibility of showing beneath the donned mask a surface displaying depth. With this personal danger is the further one of reducing all appearances to masks behind which things-in-themselves may lurk. The metaphysical hiatus between the thing-in-itself and appearance is not unrelated to the denial, suggested by Machiavelli and codified by Descartes, that the person is on display in the face.

By means of the power of art and the reality of the artist, the face and speech of personhood comes to be understood; it unfolds in a very public way on the screen and the stage. An

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[29] *The Prince*, chapter 18.

[30] See Sudi Pigott, *How to Be a Better Foodie: A Bulging Little Book for the Truly Epicurious* (London UK: Quadrille Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 16.

[31] "Deception, flattering, lying, deluding, talking behind the back, putting up a false front, living in borrowed splendor, wearing a mask, hiding behind convention, playing a role for others and for oneself--in short, a continuous fluttering around the *solitary* flame of vanity --is so much the rule and the law among men that there is almost nothing which is less comprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could have arisen among them." Nietzsche, p. 80.

[32] *Either/or*, vol. 2, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, ed. Howard A. Johnson (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1959), p. 164.

unmistakably deeper, non-public context emerges with the advent of biblical revelation: "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."[33] The writings of St. Augustine show the form of this context and its difference from the public context of stage or everyday life: "Men may speak, may be seen by the operations of their members, may be heard speaking; but whose thought is penetrated, whose heart is seen into? ...Do not you believe that there is in man a deep so profound as to be hidden even to him in whom it is?"[34] We are hidden to others and to ourselves, though we are revealed to our Creator, who is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. Here when we dissemble ourselves, we hide not from the spectator or our interlocutor but from ourselves.[35] We are who we are in the sight of God; before God we discover a new, more profound face, which the biblical tradition terms "heart."

Descartes appropriated something of this inwardness in the founding of the modern cast of mind, but he took it out of its native context. His motto, "to live well you must live unseen," does not point to a hiddenness before God but to a hiddenness before others: "Actors, taught not to let any embarrassment show on their faces, put on a mask. I will do the same. So far, I have been a spectator in this theatre which is the world, but I am now about to mount the stage, and I come forward masked."[36] The philosopher today, wary of Cartesianism, nonetheless remains unwittingly mired in its decontextualized alternatives.[37] He affirms either the pure depth of the *res cogitans* or the pure surface of the *res extensa*; he affirms the solitary rights of consciousness or the

[33] 1 Samuel 16:7 (RSV).

[34] Augustine, *In Psalmos* (XLI.13), as cited in *An Augustine Synthesis*, ed. Erich Przywara, SJ (New York NY: Sheed and Ward, 1936), p. 421. Thomas Prufer clearly manifests the difference in context between Greek phenomenal being and the theological form of mind hidden within the depths of God. See his *Recapitulations: Essays in Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1993), pp. 27-34.

[35] C. S. Lewis has captured this dissimulation powerfully in his decidedly Christian novel, *Till We Have Faces* (New York NY: Time Life Books, 1966). We have faces only when we come to see ourselves without deception, which is to say as God sees us, and this occurs fully only in the life to come.

[36] Descartes, vol. 1, p. 2. For the motto, see Descartes, vol. 3, p. 43.

[37] "The extremes of solitude and publicity first become meaningful in a theological context. When this context is weakened or ignored or attacked, but the extremes it made meaningful by conjoining them in the teaching of creation are retained, then there is modernity." Prufer, p. 33.

public reality of the machine. Returning to the person and its primary context affords the possibility of recognizing the limitations of Cartesianism. Otherwise we have but our secular solitude as a peculiar residue of a tradition belonging neither to the classical experience of the person encountering others nor the biblical experience of the person before God. Our Cartesian inheritance is a gap between who we are and how we appear, a function of a fundamental forgetfulness of our proper context. Recalling such a context reveals that to be a person is to have a face, a voice, and the ability to be on display with others.

CONCLUSION

The very term "person" emerged in the context of the stage. *Prósopon* and *persona* mean mask, the character the actor assumed. Audience members, we could say, discovered something about themselves in the very activity of the actors who conceal themselves in order to reveal. The human being is such that she can present herself as other than she is, and she can regard another as other than he is. This can be playful, but it can also be a lie depending on the context. The very peculiarity of being able to make such shifts of attention from actor to character and the very ability to act indicates a particular responsibility accorded to each of us: we are entrusted with the structure of revealing-concealing. We cannot master it, but we can delight in it and safeguard it. Heidegger calls us "Dasein" or "shepherd of being" to suggest this task, but such terms omit the self-revelation suggested by the traditional term "person."[38] To be a person is, among other things, to be able to distinguish contexts and, depending on the context, to reveal or conceal ourselves and to understand the revelation or concealment of another. Faith attests to a higher mode of revelation

[38] Heidegger says that he avoids the term "person" in order to distance himself from Husserl and Scheler; on his interpretation, they inadequately understand the being of the person as a unity of acts. *Being and Time*, § 10. His own term "Dasein" suggests that to be a person is to be delivered over to a situation in which one finds oneself together with others and thereby able to uncover things in various ways. Had Heidegger paid more attention to the ancient roots of the term "person," he would have unearthed an even stronger antidote to Cartesianism. We are not only always already in the world; we are there in such a way that we can face others and others can face us.

before God, but such a possibility should not be taken as undermining the possibility of interpersonal display; such a possibility intensifies rather than undermines the face.[39] To be a person is to have a face with which one encounters others, the world, and through them oneself.

By way of conclusion, I would like to highlight the possibility of publicly delighting in the revelation of face as such. In October 2007, Saturday Night Live staged a political Halloween party in which actors playing Bill and Hillary Clinton dressed up in Halloween costumes. The climax of the scene occurs when a man arrives wearing a rubber Obama mask. He removes it to reveal that he is none other than the real-life Senator Obama, not an actor. The actress says to Obama, "So you dressed as yourself?" Obama replies, "Well, you know, Hillary, I have nothing to hide. I enjoy being myself. I am not going to change who I am just because it is Halloween." In this collision of contexts, he can unmask his own identity, but he cannot unveil his own thoughts. He remains partly in and out of character and it is given to us the viewers to delight in this juxtaposition.

This delight brings us to the verge of philosophy. Indeed Plato calls such things "summoners" because they show up in our ordinary experience and jolt us into the philosophical perspective. The summoner is a contradiction on one level, in one context, that motivates a shift into a more fundamental dimension.[40] Movies and shows can serve as summoners because they harbor the possibility of bringing us to delight in our very ability as persons, as rational actors. We delight not in Julia Roberts *per se* but in Julia Roberts playing someone playing Julia Roberts. We delight not in Barack Obama but in an actor playing Barack Obama revealing himself to be the real

[39] Consider, for instance, the biblical theme of seeking the face of God, and the specifically Christian claim that God took on human form and as such literally has a face. See *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, rev. ed., ed. Xavier Léon-Dufour, s.v. "face" and "heart." The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., captures the significance of the face in the deeper Christian context: "...Christ plays in ten thousand places, / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his / To the Father through the features of men's faces." See "As kingfishers catch fire," in *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 3rd ed., ed. Robert Bridges and W. H. Gardner (London UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948), p. 95.

[40] *Republic*, 523c.

Barack Obama. Our delight is evidence that we glimpse these distinctions and differences of context, but of course we do not spell it out and bring it to cognition: such is the work of philosophy.