

THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN BATTISTA MONDIN'S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

*OS FUNDAMENTOS METAFÍSICOS DA PESSOA HUMANA NA
ANTROPOLOGIA FILOSÓFICA DE BATTISTA MONDIN*

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lyzes the metaphysical foundations of the human person in Mondin's philosophical thought, examines the characteristics of his phenomenological-transcendental method, and highlights the principal paths through which he develops a metaphysical justification of human personhood.

Keywords: person; metaphysics; being; philosophical anthropology; Battista Mondin.

Resumo

A problemática metafísica da pessoa humana ocupa um lugar central na história do pensamento filosófico, pois está diretamente relacionada às questões do ser, da autoconsciência, da liberdade, da dignidade e da vocação transcendente do ser humano. Essa problemática adquire particular relevância na obra do Pe. Battista Mondin, que procurou sintetizar a metafísica tomista clássica do ser com as abordagens fenomenológicas e personalistas da filosofia contemporânea. O presente artigo analisa os fundamentos metafísicos da pessoa humana no pensamento filosófico de Mondin, examina as características de seu método fenomenológico-transcendental

Abstract

The metaphysical problem of the human person occupies a central place in the history of philosophical thought, as it is directly related to the questions of being, self-consciousness, freedom, dignity, and the transcendent vocation of the human being. This issue acquires particular significance in the works of Fr. Battista Mondin, who sought to synthesize the classical Thomistic metaphysics of being with the phenomenological and personalist approaches of contemporary philosophy. This article ana-

e destaca os principais caminhos pelos quais o autor desenvolve uma justificação metafísica da pessoa humana.

Palavras-chave: pessoa; metafísica; ser; antropologia filosófica; Battista Mondin.

Introduction

The problem of the human person belongs to the fundamental questions of philosophy and theology, as it is directly concerned with understanding human nature, being, freedom, dignity, and vocation. Despite the significant development of the natural and human sciences, the question of what constitutes the deepest essence of the human person remains open. This issue has gained particular relevance in the context of contemporary anthropological and worldview transformations, where the human person is increasingly interpreted through biological, psychological, or social categories, while the metaphysical dimension of human existence is often neglected.

Among those who drew attention to the dangers of such reductionism was the Italian philosopher and theologian Fr. Battista Mondin (1926–2015) (Zavidnyak, 2025, pp. 5–46), who sought to achieve a creative synthesis between the classical metaphysics of being, particularly the Thomistic tradition, and the achievements of contemporary philosophical anthropology and personalism. In Mondin's view, the person cannot be adequately understood solely through phenomenological description or psychological analysis, since the true nature of personhood is disclosed only in the light of the metaphysics of being. For this reason, the concept of the person in Mondin's thought appears not merely as an anthropological category but as a metaphysical reality rooted in the act of being and open to transcendence.

The aim of this article is to investigate the metaphysical foundations of the human person in the works of Battista Mondin and to examine the distinctive features of his phenomenological-transcendental method, through which the philosopher moves from the analysis of human experience to the justification of the ontological foundations of personal being.

However, is there still a need, especially in the contemporary context, to appeal to metaphysics in the philosophical understanding of the human person? Does metaphysics remain relevant as an autonomous philosophical discipline despite the extensive criticism directed against it by modern philosophy? Despite the relative oblivion into which metaphysics has fallen since the time of Descartes, who displaced «the problem of being – an exclusively metaphysical problem – from the primary position in philosophical inquiry in order to place his trust in knowledge» (Mondin, 2025a, p. 51), Battista Mondin argues that metaphysics has retained its enduring significance.

According to Mondin, «Metaphysics has not disappeared and cannot disappear. The attempts of philosophers and theologians to consign metaphysics to oblivion are insufficient to erase the metaphysical intuition rooted in the very being

of the human person» (Mondin, 2025a, p. 52). Metaphysics is necessary not only for understanding phenomenal reality, which is contingent and ontologically dependent, but also for understanding the human being as a being who raises questions concerning his or her own existence, origin, and ultimate destiny. For this reason, Mondin maintains that the metaphysical dimension constitutes an indispensable condition for any integral anthropology.

As the philosopher further observes: «It is important to recognize the absolute contingency of the world of phenomena, its instability and fragility; therefore, it is necessary to leave this world, to move beyond it and beyond the human person in order to grasp its ultimate foundation» (Mondin, 2025a, p. 57). Consequently, the task of metaphysics is not to reject empirical reality but to lead from the changing and limited world of appearances toward the search for its ultimate ontological ground.

1. Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of the Study

The problem of the metaphysical foundations of the human person occupies an important place in the intellectual legacy of the Catholic philosopher and theologian Fr. Battista Mondin, finding expression in both his metaphysical and anthropological works, particularly in *Antropologia filosofica. L'uomo: un progetto impossibile?* (Mondin, 1983), *Ontology and Metaphysics* (Mondin, 2010), *Philosophical anthropology and the philosophy of culture and education* (Mondin, V.5, 2025b) and others. The first of these works is divided into two parts: «Phenomenology of Human Activity» and «Metaphysical Anthropology». Mondin's metaphysical conception of the person is grounded in the results of a comprehensive phenomenological analysis of human experience and activity.

The first part consists of seven chapters devoted to life, knowledge, consciousness, freedom, language, culture, and work. The second part addresses the themes of self-transcendence (the capacity to go beyond oneself, which constitutes a characteristic feature of human existence), the human being as person and individual, the relationship between body and soul, and immortality understood as life after death.

In his review of this work, Fernand van Steenberghen argues that «the metaphysical theses proposed by the author are consistently grounded in the Thomistic tradition; however, their exposition remains relatively concise and insufficiently developed» (Van Steenberghen, 1985). This circumstance highlights the particular

significance of *Ontology and Metaphysics*, in which Mondin develops much more extensively those metaphysical intuitions concerning the person that had been presented only in a condensed form in his anthropological studies.

Indeed, in *Ontology and Metaphysics*, Mondin offers a far more systematic and comprehensive treatment of the metaphysical foundations of human existence and the concept of the person. He understands the person as a spiritual substance, a bearer of consciousness, freedom, and self-transcendence. Throughout the two major sections of the work – the ontological and the metaphysical – the person is examined not merely as a being endowed with an act of being (*actus essendi*), but also as a spiritual and metaphysical reality whose nature transcends the limits of purely empirical knowledge. The person thus appears as a being capable of recognizing its own contingency and, through this awareness, transcending it in openness to transcendent Being.

Metaphysics, however, is not limited merely to the search for a first cause or the ultimate ground of being. Its task also consists in the critical examination of the very mode of existence of the realities encountered in human experience. For this reason, the central issue of metaphysical inquiry becomes the problem of contingency, that is, the dependence and non-ultimate character of all finite beings. The awareness of such limitation leads the human person to seek a foundation of being that is not subject to change, chance, or disappearance. As Mondin observes:

It should be noted that the principal problem of metaphysics concerns not being as such, but rather finite being. Precisely because finite being is finite, it cannot be absolutized without giving rise to contradiction. It would be absurd if a complete reality were marked by the highest instability, by the greatest degree of nothingness. It is precisely this fragile and contingent condition of finite beings that constitutes the central concern of metaphysics. Such a state of radical instability characterizes the physical, historical, and human world. Therefore, one may enter into metaphysics either by proceeding from the contingency of the world (*ex contingentia mundi*), as the ancient philosophers did, or by proceeding from the contingency of the human person (*ex contingentia hominis*), which, according to contemporary philosophers, is the more appropriate approach (Mondin, 2025a, p. 59).

This constitutes one of the distinctive features of the contemporary metaphysics of the person. Whereas classical metaphysical thought generally began its search for the absolute foundation of being from the contingency of the cosmos and the surrounding world, contemporary philosophical anthropology increasingly takes as its point of departure the contingency of the human person.

Consequently, metaphysical inquiry acquires particular significance when its object becomes the human person. While the world as a whole manifests its contingency through changeability and dependence, the human person experiences this contingency in the most immediate way – through finitude, freedom, dependence on others, and the search for the meaning of existence. For this reason, anthropological questions cannot be adequately understood without reference to the metaphysical foundations of human being. For Mondin, the question of the person is not merely an anthropological issue but also a metaphysical one, since it concerns the deepest ground of human existence, as well as its uniqueness, dignity, and vocation. Consequently, the investigation of the concept of the person occupies a central place in his philosophical-anthropological thought.

The problem of the human person occupies an important place in contemporary Christian philosophy and theology. It has been developed through a variety of metaphysical and personalist approaches. Significant contributions to the formation of the metaphysical foundations of Christian philosophical anthropology were made by Cornelio Fabro and Étienne Gilson. Within the Thomistic tradition, Fabro develops the doctrine of *actus essendi*, emphasizing the participation of finite beings in the act of being (Fabro, 2005, pp. 183–260), while Gilson argues for the primacy of *esse* as the fundamental principle of metaphysics (Gilson, 1952).

More directly, the personalist understanding of the human person has been developed by thinkers such as Karol Wojtyła, Joseph Ratzinger, and John Zizioulas. Wojtyła interprets the person through the prism of conscious and free action, which constitutes the basis of human self-realization (Wojtyła, 2008). In the theological thought of Joseph Ratzinger, the problem of the person is considered within the context of Trinitarian theology and the Christian understanding of the human being as a reality open to God and interpersonal communion (Ratzinger, 1969). John Zizioulas further develops this perspective through the category of communion, understanding personhood as a mode of being realized in relationship with God and with other persons (Zizioulas, 1997).

Within this intellectual context, the philosophical anthropology of Fr. Battista Mondin seeks to unite the metaphysical tradition of being with the personalist understanding of the human person, presenting the person as a spiritual substance endowed with dignity, freedom, and openness to transcendence.

2. The Problem of the Method of Metaphysics

In *Ontology and Metaphysics*, where Mondin addresses the fundamental questions of being and its ultimate foundations, special attention is devoted to the problem of the method of metaphysical inquiry. According to the philosopher, just as every scientific discipline requires its own method, metaphysics must likewise possess a distinctive mode of inquiry corresponding to its proper object. For this reason, Mondin emphasizes that «the method of metaphysics cannot be exactly the same as that employed by the other sciences» (Mondin, 2010, p. 97).

Alongside a critical analysis of the approaches proposed by thinkers of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Modern period, Mondin develops his own conception of the metaphysical method, which serves as the foundation for understanding the being of the human person. The point of departure of such an inquiry is being as being (*ens qua ens*), that is, any reality that possesses existence. From the consideration of beings, metaphysical reflection proceeds toward their deepest foundation – being itself (*esse*). As Mondin states: «In the metaphysics of being and person that we are attempting to construct, the object of inquiry is being as being, whereas its goal can be nothing other than Being itself, for beyond being there is nothing; beyond being there is only nothingness» (Mondin, 2010, p. 98).

In this context, the problem of the human person emerges not merely as an anthropological question but also as a metaphysical one. The person is a unique kind of being that not only exists but is also conscious of its own existence and capable of freedom, self-knowledge, and transcendence. For this reason, the investigation of the human person necessarily transcends the level of phenomenological description and proceeds toward the metaphysical grounding of personhood.

Mondin divides the metaphysical path of inquiry into three interconnected stages: the phenomenological, the hermeneutical, and the resolute. Each of these performs a distinct function in the gradual transition from the experience of beings to the knowledge of their ultimate ontological foundation. As Mondin explains:

The first stage is *phenomenological*, whose aim is to obtain an adequate description of being and its fundamental elements. The second stage is *hermeneutical*, in which we seek what is most primordial and deepest within being. The final stage is *resolute*, leading being to its ultimate foundation, Subsistent Being (Mondin, 2010, p. 98).

This structure of the method reflects the overall logic of Mondin's philosophical project. The phenomenological stage enables a description of the principal

manifestations of personal being, the hermeneutical stage seeks to uncover their inner meaning and interrelation, while the resolute stage is directed toward the discovery of the ultimate ontological foundation of the person. Through these three stages of metaphysical inquiry, a comprehensive understanding of the human person becomes possible. Thus, beginning with a phenomenological analysis of human experience and activity, and proceeding through hermeneutical interpretation, Mondin arrives at the transcendental foundations of personal being and action.

As Mondin himself states: «Our method may also be called phenomenological-transcendental. It is *phenomenological* insofar as it undertakes a careful analysis of being as such or of its universal manifestations; it is *transcendental* insofar as it seeks the ultimate conditions that make being possible» (Mondin, 2010, p. 98).

It should be noted that the transcendental method, as interpreted by Mondin, bears little resemblance to the transcendental philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Mondin explicitly distances himself from the Kantian understanding of transcendental inquiry, which is primarily concerned with the *a priori* conditions that make human cognition possible. Instead, he understands the transcendental method as a path leading from the analysis of phenomena to the discovery of their deepest roots and ultimate causes.

As he explains: «The transcendental method, as we understand it, should not be identified with Kant's method. Rather, we seek to determine the conditions that make knowledge (or a thing) possible in the sense of uncovering its roots and ultimate causes, beginning from a profound examination of phenomena» (Mondin, 2025b, V.5, p. 18).

Thus, Mondin's transcendental method remains metaphysical in its essential character. Its aim is not merely to establish the epistemological conditions of experience, but to move from the phenomenal manifestations of reality to the ontological foundations that make them possible. In this respect, Mondin's approach stands much closer to the realist metaphysical tradition of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and contemporary Thomism than to Kant's transcendental idealism.

Accordingly, both in the field of philosophical anthropology and in metaphysics, Mondin employs a phenomenological-transcendental method, which assumes distinct characteristics in each discipline according to its specific object of inquiry. Since the anthropological dimensions of the concept of the person in the thought of Fr. Battista Mondin have already been examined in a previous study (Kopystynskyi, 2026), the present article seeks instead to reconstruct his own metaphysical grounding of personhood and to clarify the place of the concept of the person within the structure of his ontological-metaphysical system.

3. The Phenomenology of Personal Being

Alongside the anthropological interpretation of the concept of the person, Fr. Battista Mondin also develops its understanding within a metaphysical perspective. In his philosophical system, the concept of the person cannot be adequately understood apart from the metaphysics of being. The human person appears not merely as an anthropological category but, above all, as a metaphysical reality rooted in the act of being and open to transcendence.

Mondin begins his treatment of this issue with a phenomenological analysis of human experience and activity, seeking to identify the principal manifestations of personal being. The next step consists in uncovering the metaphysical foundations of these manifestations, thereby moving from the description of phenomena to an understanding of their ontological ground.

It should also be noted that Mondin is the author of the three-volume *History of Metaphysics*, the work that testifies to his profound familiarity with the development of metaphysical thought and lends particular weight to his own metaphysical constructions (Mondin, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c).

The metaphysical understanding of the concept of the person is preceded by a phenomenological analysis. According to Mondin, a comprehensive presentation of the phenomenological manifestations of human existence and activity is indispensable, since they constitute the outward expression of the ontological properties of the person. In general, he identifies the following characteristics of personhood: subsistence, continuity and interiority, self-consciousness, freedom and self-determination, embodiment, coexistence, pro-existence and communion, otherness, closeness, projectivity, and transcendence. In addition, Mondin distinguishes several fundamental ontological structures, namely the hylomorphic structure (matter and form), the composition of substance and accidents, the relation between essence and existence, and the distinction between act and potency (Mondin, 2010, pp. 202–222). These characteristics are not merely empirical traits of human existence; rather, they reveal the ontological depth of the person and prepare the way for a metaphysical investigation of personhood.

The aim of the phenomenological stage of inquiry is to describe the principal manifestations of personal being and human activity. Through the analysis of these manifestations, Mondin seeks to identify those characteristics that distinguish the person from other forms of being while at the same time opening the way toward an understanding of its deeper metaphysical foundations. As he states:

...the human being is a *metaphysical being*. Human beings are structurally metaphysical insofar as they are constituted by matter and spirit; they are also metaphysical from an epistemological point of view, since they are capable of producing metaphysics. Consequently, metaphysics can be pursued from below in two ways: either through the study of the world, thereby transcending the world, or through the study of the person; the latter corresponds to the personalist paradigm (Mondin, 2010, p. 202).

Accordingly, phenomenological analysis serves as a necessary prerequisite for the subsequent metaphysical investigation of the human person.

It should be noted that the list of personal characteristics proposed by Mondin is not an arbitrary collection of anthropological traits. Rather, it represents the outcome of a long development of metaphysical and anthropological thought, which the philosopher thoroughly examined in his three-volume *History of Metaphysics*. Thus, subsistence and continuity are rooted in the classical metaphysics of substance, from Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas. Self-consciousness and freedom occupy a central place in modern philosophy. Coexistence, otherness, and closeness acquire particular significance within the philosophy of dialogue (Buber, 1923, 1947; Marcel, 1935, 1951; Levinas, 1961, 1974) and twentieth-century personalism (Guardini, 1939). Projectivity (Heidegger, 1962) and transcendence (Jaspers, 1932) reflect important insights of phenomenology and existential philosophy. In this way, Mondin seeks to present the human person as an integral reality in which the ontological, existential, relational, and transcendental dimensions of being converge.

4. The Concept of the Person in the Light of Metaphysics

As the point of departure for the metaphysical grounding of the person, Mondin chooses neither the external world nor an abstract concept of being, but the human person itself as the most perfect manifestation of being. According to Mondin, it is personhood that most fully discloses the ontological nature of human being. As he states: «... our being – more precisely, that aspect which most perfectly and fully characterizes it, namely personhood itself, understood as the spiritual subsistence of the person and the person's belonging to the spiritual realm» (Mondin, 2010, p. 223).

In his investigation of the person, Mondin seeks to uncover not only its phenomenological manifestations but also the ontological and transcendent foundations

that make its existence possible. For this reason, «the beginning of the journey is the human person, existing in the spiritual dimension, in order to arrive at another personal principle, likewise existing in the spiritual dimension, namely the First Person» (Mondin, 2010, p. 223).

It should also be noted, as Mondin himself observes, that an important attempt to construct a metaphysics of the First Person was undertaken by Arata. However, this remains a metaphysics of the First Person of a Platonic type, that is, one developed entirely from above (a priori) rather than from the concrete experience of the human person (Arata, 1989, pp. 181–200).

Also significant in this context is the work of John F. Crosby, who explores the mystery of personal individuality and uniqueness, or what he calls *selfhood*. Drawing upon the Thomistic tradition, phenomenology, and Christian personalism, Crosby analyzes the subjectivity of the person, the inner dimension of personal existence, and the capacity for transcendence, especially as manifested in moral life. His concepts of *selfhood*, *uniqueness*, and *transcendence* make it possible to understand the person as an enduring «I», endowed with interiority, freedom, and openness to transcendence. According to Crosby, personal *selfhood* does not isolate the individual from others. Rather, it constitutes the foundation of authentic interpersonal relationships and ultimately directs the person toward God as the source of personal being (Crosby, 1996).

Thus, unlike classical metaphysics, which typically began with an analysis of being as being (*ens qua ens*) or with the contingency of the world (*ex contingentia mundi*), contemporary personalist metaphysics increasingly turns to the experience of the human person as a privileged locus for the disclosure of being and as a path toward the First Person. In this context, Mondin's approach may be understood as an attempt to unite the Thomistic metaphysics of being with a phenomenological analysis of the person, proceeding from the experience of the self-conscious and free human person toward its ontological and transcendental foundations. At the metaphysical level, Mondin derives new paths of inquiry from his phenomenological investigation of the person – paths that are properly metaphysical in character. As he states:

From the phenomenological grounding of the human person that we have proposed, it follows that the most important manifestations of personhood, which may serve as paths toward the knowledge of the First Person, are the following: existence, self-transcendence, freedom, and projectivity. Additional metaphysical paths are those of duty, value, and personal dignity (Mondin, 2010, p. 224).

According to Mondin, these paths constitute the most reliable avenues of metaphysical inquiry. Through them, it becomes possible to ground the reality of the human person in relation to the First Person and to uncover the ultimate foundation of personal being. The purpose of the metaphysics of the First Person is not primarily to demonstrate the existence of the First Person itself. Rather, its task is to illuminate the ontological dependence of finite persons upon the First Person as the ultimate source of their being and personhood. As Mondin states:

The First Person has no need of such a demonstration, since it is the unique source of truth, certainty, and the primary and sole source of existence and being. Personalist metaphysics is directed toward a different task: the metaphysical grounding of «second persons», namely, finite and embodied spiritual beings such as ourselves. (Mondin, 2010, p. 224).

This approach is of fundamental importance for Mondin's metaphysics, since it allows the investigation to begin from the reality in which the person most fully manifests its essential characteristics through existence, self-transcendence, freedom, and projectivity, as well as through duty, values, and dignity. These paths of metaphysical grounding are not arbitrary. Each of them discloses a particular aspect of the spiritual nature of the person and points toward its transcendent dimension. Consequently, they function as metaphysical signposts leading from the description of human experience to an understanding of the ontological foundations of personal being.

What distinguishes Mondin's metaphysical grounding of the person from the paths followed by other philosophers, including Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Blondel, and others, is its point of departure. As Mondin explains:

Instead of taking as our starting point the contingent realization of an objective value (truth, being, beauty, perfection, and so forth), we take as our point of departure the value-subject, namely ourselves (thus our path becomes exclusively anthropological). Becoming aware of the absolute value of our own person, we set out in search of the foundation of such value and discover that, ultimately, the only adequate foundation can be Absolute Value itself, namely God – the First Person (Mondin, 2010, p. 230).

From a metaphysical perspective, all these paths share a common purpose: to demonstrate that the person is not merely a natural individual but a spiritual and subsistent being that participates in being and is open to the Being of *Esse ipsum subsistens*, that is, the First Person. For this reason, Mondin's metaphysics of the person does not reject the classical path of *ex contingentia mundi*; rather, it

complements it with the path of *ex contingentia hominis*. This, in fact, constitutes one of the defining characteristics of his «metaphysics of the person».

Conclusions

The present study has reconstructed the metaphysical understanding of the concept of the person within the philosophical system of Fr. Battista Mondin and clarified its place within the broader framework of his ontological-metaphysical project. The analysis has demonstrated that the problem of the person occupies a central position in his thought, since the person constitutes the privileged locus where the phenomenological, anthropological, and metaphysical dimensions of human existence converge.

The study has shown that Mondin develops an original synthesis of the classical Thomistic metaphysics of being with the achievements of phenomenology, personalism, and contemporary philosophical anthropology. Unlike approaches that remain confined to the description of human experience or the psychological analysis of personality, Mondin seeks to uncover the ontological and transcendent foundations of personal being. Consequently, the human person appears in his philosophy not merely as an anthropological category but primarily as a metaphysical reality rooted in the act of being and open to transcendence.

Particular importance is attributed to Mondin's phenomenological-transcendental method. Unlike the Kantian understanding of the transcendental method, which is concerned with the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of human cognition, Mondin employs it as a means of moving from the phenomenal manifestations of human existence toward their ultimate ontological foundations. The threefold structure of his inquiry – phenomenological, hermeneutical, and resolute – enables a systematic transition from the description of lived experience to the discovery of its metaphysical ground.

The study further demonstrates that the phenomenological analysis of the person is not an end in itself but rather a necessary preparation for metaphysical investigation. The characteristics of personhood identified by Mondin – subsistence, self-consciousness, freedom, coexistence, projectivity, transcendence, and others – do not constitute an arbitrary collection of anthropological traits. Rather, they reflect the historical development of metaphysical, anthropological, and personalist thought from antiquity to the present. Through these characteristics, the person is disclosed as a spiritual and subsistent being capable of transcending its own contingency.

One of the most distinctive features of Mondin's metaphysics of the person

is the shift in the point of departure of metaphysical inquiry. Whereas classical metaphysics generally proceeded from being as being or from the contingency of the world (*ex contingentia mundi*), Mondin proposes beginning from the contingency of the human person (*ex contingentia hominis*). For this reason, existence, self-transcendence, freedom, projectivity, duty, values, and personal dignity become privileged paths of metaphysical inquiry. Through these paths, it becomes possible to move from the experience of the human person to the First Person as the ultimate source of being, truth, and value.

Therefore, Mondin's metaphysics of the person may be understood as an attempt to ground the human person through its relation to the First Person. The aim of this project is not primarily to prove the existence of God, but rather to disclose the ontological dependence of finite persons upon *Esse ipsum subsistens*. The originality of Mondin's philosophical project lies precisely in this synthesis of the classical metaphysics of being and the personalist understanding of the human person. As such, it offers a significant contribution to contemporary Christian anthropology and provides a fruitful framework for further reflection on the metaphysical foundations of personhood.

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