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No “We” Without Symbolic Debt? Founding the First-Person Plural and Inheriting Patrimony

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Abstract

Roger Scruton identified three basic forms of communal loyalties that produce the first-person plural “we”: the national, the tribal, and the credal. Scruton argues that it is the national that maximally permits plurality and difference without jeopardising peaceful coexistence; it even makes possible self-sacrifice for the stranger. The generation of such a first-person plural requires a commitment both to non-contractual forms of obligation for its members and non-purposive activities that transcend questions of utility. These can be seen as keeping alive the question of the bonum honestum, which founds the common good. Pope John Paul II discusses the first-person plural in phenomenological-personalistic terms, as an accidental formation patterned according to the substantial I–Thou relationship between persons. The I–Thou points towards the true good, and this is what allows nations to arise. But various forms of masquerading are here possible, whether it be credal loyalty pretending to be national, or dutiful and moral customs devoid of the bonum honestum as a stabilisation. Both threaten true freedom. John Paul II shows that it is the task of the “we” community to inherit the national patrimony. It is Massimo Recalcati that shows us that, for all its beneficial wealth, this inheriting involves an inevitable mourning and incurring of “symbolic debt”. Only a correct relation to this debt will allow the first-person plural properly to arise and inherit the national patrimony.

Keywords: Roger Scruton; John Paul II; Massimo Recalcati; inheritance; first-person plural; symbolic debt; patriotism; nationalism; political philosophy; social contract theory



Academic Editor: Jacob Phillips

Received: 4 March 2025

Revised: 27 August 2025

Accepted: 1 September 2025

Published: 15 September 2025

Citation: Wojtulewicz, Christopher M. 2025. No “We” Without Symbolic Debt? Founding the First-Person Plural and Inheriting Patrimony. *Religions* 16: 1188. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16091188>

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1. Introduction

A nation is founded on an idea of loyalty. In the case of the nation-state, as Roger Scruton has argued, this is the “first-person plural” or “we” constellating around a shared territory and its patrimony. The first-person plural is a communal sense of belonging upon which a politically organised society can exist, spontaneously issuing from a nexus of gifting and inheritance. It is therefore outside of political society, yet fundamentally constitutive of it. How exactly is this first-person plural established and, once established, maintained?

Scruton shows us that this sense of “we” can arise on the basis of three kinds of loyalty: national, tribal (or kinship), and credal. The national concerns the loyalty arising from shared territory—a bond that develops from a loyalty to that home, its people, its laws, and its customs. Tribal societies arise where kinship bonds structure society; they “tend to be hierarchical, with accountability running one way—from subject to chief—but not from chief to subject” (Scruton 2006, pp. 10–11). Credal societies are religious, and membership depends on “worship and obedience” (Scruton 2006, p. 11).

Does this triad of loyalties correspond in any way to a Catholic understanding of the foundations of society? A shared sense of commitment to one's fellow human beings is clear in Catholic teaching, but is this sufficient to ground a society? Pope John Paul II gives extended reflections on the idea of nationality from a Catholic perspective. On the one hand, philosophical writings before accession to the papacy develop a phenomenological–personalistic account of human intersubjectivity,¹ considering both dyadic and communal forms. This we could describe as his equivalent to Scruton's first-person plural. On the other hand, reflections during his papacy concern specifically the ideas of inheriting the "native land", the patria, and freedom in personal and national life. This pushes forward quite considerably themes only inchoately expressed magisterially.

In exploring Scruton's and John Paul II's understanding of the nation, and specifically the sense of unity and loyalty among the members of it, we find a series of mutually enlightening observations. We find in what they share a view quite different from social contract theory,² though not necessarily exclusionary of it; both their considerations are more rudimentary. The concern is for a certain foundationalism: what is it that allows a society to arise at all and flourish in nationhood? Scruton articulates various contributing factors to the first-person plural, and John Paul II describes the conditions that correctly orient it.

We will look at Scruton and John Paul II in turn, outlining the philosophical grounds for their positions. From this we will see the importance of *inheritance*: what a society chooses to do with the national patrimony bequeathed to it by past generations is key to the founding and maintaining of the first-person plural. Inescapable in a treatment of inheritance, however, is the debt it incurs. A Lacanian understanding of "symbolic debt", as explained by Massimo Recalcati, helps us navigate the different responses to inheritance in keeping with both Scruton's and John Paul II's philosophical and theological reflections. This will allow us to draw conclusions both diagnostic and reparative for societies struggling with the maintenance of the first-person plural.

2. How Does the First-Person Plural Arise?

Scruton explains the origin of the first-person plural in terms of its necessary pre-existence to political life.³ All political life, whatever form it takes, relies firstly on a pre-existing sense of a community; that is, a "we" who come together to settle disputes, to collaborate, and to establish a settled way of neighbourliness. This, following Hegel, he then contrasts with the approach of the social contract theorists, who mistakenly think of human beings firstly as rational first-person singulars who come together in an exercise of that individual reason to form a social contract (see Hörcher 2023, p. 105). It is not that Scruton thinks all social contracts are impossible; rather, they rely on an already-established first-person plural that they do not adequately recognise (see Cockram 2019, p. 68).

Yet showing that the social contract theorists were wrong to assume the existence of a mythical homo oeconomicus and that a first-person plural lies behind all social and political life is not to explain how the first-person plural arises.⁴ To do that, one needs to abstract the founding reasons from Scruton's argument against homo oeconomicus. He points out that the presumed rational exchange between individuals that leads to a social contract and the demands it places upon them are parts of a utilitarian assessment of the individual, based on two important factors: first, whether the individual gives free assent; second, the purpose or function the individual's life may have in pursuit of the communal goal of society. The problem lies not in free contractual undertakings and common purposiveness as such, but their inflation to a totalising explanation of communal life. Scruton is clear that society not only needs other approaches to these matters; it needs them more foundationally than either of these two. Herein we find how the first-person plural arises.

2.1. Non-Contractual Obligations

First, at its deepest, Scruton thinks that society relies on “non-contractual obligations” (Scruton 2019, p. 23; see Hörcher 2023, p. 70). Such obligations are also referred to as “pieties” which are “transcendent” (Morello 2022, pp. 13–14).⁵ Free assent to obligations (i.e., contracts) comes later. Familial bonds, friendships, and religious observances draw on these non-contractual obligations—that is, obligations incumbent upon the individual by dint of existence and inheritance, and not because they have been chosen for their utility. That is not to say that those obligations are irrational; his position, rather, distinguishes types of human rationality and separates them from the pervasive dominance of utility. Scruton speaks of both “instinctive and personal” motives here, the former being “blind attachment” and the latter “a sense of responsibility to others and to the moral way of life” (Scruton 2019, p. 20). Neither belong to *homo oeconomicus*. Instinctual motives include matters like “the impulse to cling to the mother”, whereas personal motives “arise from reason itself” and include things like “the sense of justice” (Scruton 2019, p. 20). In either case, however, the motives do not stem from the idea of the rational individual operating in self-interest. It is the opposite of Hobbes’ view in the *Leviathan*, which Scruton quotes: “there being no obligation on any man, which ariseth not from some act of his own” (Hobbes (1996), part 2, chapter 21, 10, here p. 144; cited in Scruton (2019, p. 20)).

Scruton makes clear that the sense of obligation to look after one’s parents, for instance, does not arise from any rational deliberation in which benefits and costs are calculated; rather, it has the shape of an obligation which immanently arises from the way things are. In another register we might say that it is an obligation arising from our existence, from the fact that they gifted us life. In Scruton’s view, only a social bond which pre-exists rational choosing can give rise to these sorts of non-contractual obligation; yet they would be misrepresented if considered irrational. This kind of first-person plural therefore does not arise *from* anything but describes the interpersonal state of human existence as such. Existence itself is the incurring of a debt of gratitude, which is then expressed in non-contractual obligations.

Non-contractual obligations of a familial nature may seem obviously without origin, their sense arising from the state of being human before anything else. Yet the immediacy of the familial examples may well cause us to wonder whether and to what extent such a rationale can be applied to ties of a non-familial sort. It is indeed the case that Scruton broadly acknowledges three types of loyalty (national, tribal, and credal), and that each of these can produce their own sort of first-person plural. The tribal or kinship bonds could be seen in the terms we have already described, with inherited hierarchies and familial obligations. Credal loyalties can substitute for tribal loyalties in that they seek to spiritually introduce an idea of kinship bonds which are then universalised. National loyalties, however, derive their sense of obligation from the territory that is shared with the stranger. It is the relationship to the stranger, Scruton thinks, that sets the national apart from the tribal and credal forms of loyalty because it is what grounds the possibility for the impartial rule of law among equal citizens.

When the grounds for the social bond between persons is the shared territory that all desire to call home, the nature of the interest of one person in another is neighbourly. The idea is that we share a love of the land that is ours, and this draws out all manner of non-contractual obligations that we might preserve our settled way of life. It means that we are predisposed to arrange ourselves such that there are reciprocal rights and duties of each member, and that none are exempt from the rule of law. Under such conditions, “strangers can trust one another”, because all are “bound by a common set of rules” (Scruton 2006, p. 7). Scruton thinks that if all are subject to the same laws, equally and dispassionately applied, and all are party to a reciprocal arrangement of rights and duties, then each who

comes under such an arrangement is free to trust everyone else within it. The Hobbesian nightmarish stalemate of fear need have no purchase on such citizens. Scruton's point contrasts other first-person plural arrangements which may, at first, seem to have the same benefits as a national-oriented first-person plural. Trust in the national loyalty case would not, for instance, "depend on family connections, tribal loyalties or favours granted and earned" (Scruton 2006, p. 7).

Despite this identification of the effects of reciprocal rights and obligations, and the rule of law, Scruton does at one point seem to retract the pre-political nature of the first-person plural. He writes, "Territorial jurisdictions require legislation, and therefore a political process. This process transforms shared territory into a shared identity. And that identity is the nation state" (Scruton 2006, p. 14). This is to say, the political process generates the first-person plural constellated around territory (i.e., national loyalty) and is not presupposed in order for the political process to take place. One needs to distinguish "nation" from "nation state" here, the former pre-existing the latter; but even then, it is hard to read "transforms shared territory into shared identity" without conceding either that shared identity did not exist prior to the transformative political process, or that any prior shared identity was not based on territory. The former possibility seems to undo the need for a first-person plural prior to the political; the latter suggests that national loyalty is not spontaneous but created by the political process, perhaps requiring even some prior form of loyalty.

It is clear that Scruton's position is generally more in favour of a pre-political formation of identity. In light of his admission here, however, it remains unclear what precise relation the political process should have to the first-person plural, either in its formation or its development. The point raises questions of logical or temporal priority, much in the way one finds with discussions of the state of nature in social contract theory. Although a solution to this tension exists, the question must remain in suspended irresolution for the purposes of our focus. Moreover, the pre-political formation is congruent, as we shall see, with both John Paul II's understanding of community and what Massimo Recalcati calls "subjectivization".

2.2. Non-Purposive Activities

A second condition which Scruton thinks gives rise to the first-person plural is the prevalence of what we might call *non-purposive activities*. It is mistaken, he thinks, to envisage society as directed to some common goal (Scruton 2019, p. 25). Non-purposive activities, like non-contractual obligations, are then logically prior to purposive or goal-oriented activities. Play, friendship, family life, education—when rightly understood, Scruton thinks these are non-purposive and performed for their own sake. They are logically prior because goods derive from them secondarily, and so, Scruton remarks, it is mistaken to pursue these goods as goals (Scruton 2019, p. 25). The distinction here follows Michael Oakeshott's "civil association" versus "enterprise association" (Oakeshott 1975, pp. 108–84; see also Scruton 2019, p. 26).

From the foregoing we may understand that when non-purposive activities are pursued, a natural first-person plural arises. We might think of the example of knowledge. A university is an institution built around the pursuit of knowledge. Provided it is pursued for its own sake, we could say a first-person plural arises among those who mutually undertake the pursuit. This is different from the establishment of a committee who meet in order to achieve some specific end. Although this may give rise to a form of membership, it is of a clearly different order to the spontaneous membership arising from the pursuit of something for its own sake. In the committee each member brings only that which pertains to the advancement of the common goal. In the university, because there is no goal, each

member is free to bring their entire self. Lifelong friendships are thus made at university, but not so much in committees.

Another way in which Scruton expresses the difference that non-purposiveness makes is in the formation of a nation according to “decision” and the “invisible hand” (Scruton 2006, p. 13). This is to say that whilst deliberative process and design necessarily contributes to the founding and building of a nation, there will always be a “spontaneity and naturalness” (Scruton 2006, p. 14). This point corresponds to the notion of non-contractual obligations and non-purposive activities in that there is always a suprarational (perhaps we might even say unconscious?) aspect to building a nation and its constituent institutions.

Setting these points against the social contract theorists’ basic premises, as Scruton does, not only shows the antecedent nature of the first-person plural, but it also shows that non-contractual obligation and non-purposive activity give rise to the first-person plural. Having unchosen obligations, such as a duty of care to one’s parents or obligations to God following infant baptism, establishes and maintains a nexus of interpersonal relations (see also the point, “duty is the outcome of the actual relation determining the existence of man, expressed in metaphysics as contingency”, in Bouzyk (2018, p. 100)). It does not simply bind together a set of individuals; persons emerge as constituted by their bonds of social relation. Those social relations are essentially non-purposive: there is no common project. They introduce, rather, an orientation towards the world that is familial. Families, we might say, do not go on holiday for a purpose, but simply to be with one another. Civil institutions and societies that give membership are associations of common interest but not necessarily a common goal. So, the non-purposive activities arrange and orient one towards the first-person plural.⁶

Purposive activity, Scruton thinks, can also yield a first-person plural, but it can dominate, and it tends towards the “instrumentalized” society of the Soviet Union, in which everything was put towards “the one overriding purpose of ‘building socialism’” and the “work of the secret police was to control and if possible prevent free association [...]” (Scruton 2019, p. 26). In Scruton’s view, the predominance of purpose—and still more the absolute reduction to a single purpose—forces the situation of man as homo oeconomicus, which is to say, forces an arrangement of the first-person singular rather than a first-person plural.

A final point about Scruton’s approach regarding the first-person plural is that he thinks “[f]irst person awareness and practical reason (the giving and taking of reasons for action) are the forces that shape the human person” (Scruton 2014, p. 76). At first this seems to contradict his repudiation of homo oeconomicus and the necessity of both non-contractual obligations and non-purposive activities. This does not mean he envisages the individual as a Cartesian subject isolated from the world in some measure. He thinks, rather, of the world in terms of an “I-You encounter”. This encounter relies on the fact that “the logic of first-person awareness is built into the concepts through which our mutual dealings are shaped” (Scruton 2014, p. 77). The point is captured by the two perspectives of Wittgenstein and Hegel, which Scruton views as both expressing aspects of the one human reality, which is to say, on the one hand, our capability to speak directly in the first-person, and on the other hand, our ability to acknowledge our otherness precisely in acknowledging the otherness of someone else (Scruton 2017, pp. 50–55). We will find a very similar anthropology espoused by Wojtyła.

3. National Loyalty in Particular?

Why is the national sense of the first-person plural the most important in Scruton’s eyes? It is, he thinks, “the only form of membership that has so far shown itself able to sustain a democratic process and a liberal rule of law” (Scruton 2006, p. 10). It seems that

the relation to the stranger is needed to some extent, for it is what allows the impartial rule of law. Where the first-person plural is built upon tribal or kinship loyalties, not only is the impartial rule of law not possible, but the stranger is not so much a potential neighbour as an “outsider” and subject to a different rule of law, or else “outside the law altogether” (Scruton 2006, p. 11). Scruton thinks that credal loyalty works in much the same way as the tribal, in that the bond is “worship and obedience” (Scruton 2006, p. 11).

So how does Scruton define the national loyalty? What does a member of such a community in fact need to be loyal to? It is not only the idea of commitment to other people, because we see that the first-person plural is possible also in tribal and credal terms. It is, then, a question of the structure or kind of relation to others that each kind of loyalty procures. Nevertheless, Scruton points towards the same sorts of things that constitute John Paul II’s idea of patrimony: “By nation I mean a people settled in a certain territory, who share institutions, customs and a sense of history and who regard themselves as equally committed both to their place of residence and to the legal and political process that governs it” (Scruton 2006, p. 12).

John Paul II does speak about the nation and what creates it as being important. But after considering the delineation of types of loyalty that generate the first-person plural in Scruton’s thought, an obvious preliminary question begins to arise: Will John Paul II’s view prove too much like the credal loyalty from which Scruton is seeking to distinguish national loyalty? John Paul II concerns himself with the national in a particular way which invokes the pursuit of truth, as we shall see, but it would be difficult to construe his view in terms of Scruton’s credal loyalty.

For Scruton it is clear that the emphasis is on the territory, as it is that which guarantees the neighbourliness of national loyalty and contrasts so vividly with the familial membership of the tribal and the “faithful” membership of the credal (Scruton 2006, p. 12). Yet at the same time, it is precisely in the absence of the territorial that John Paul II comes to the opposite conclusion. When the territory is removed, can the national loyalty survive in any way? It would seem that the answer to this would be somewhat shaky on Scrutonian ground. For John Paul II it is clear that the cultural and spiritual patrimony of Poland is anchored by the territory; and yet, in the latter’s absence, Poland not only survived but flourished. The nation “refers to the land, the territory”, but—and here is the crucial distinction—even “more importantly, the concept of patria includes the values and the spiritual content that go to make up the culture of a given nation” (John Paul II 2005, p. 66).⁷

It is clear, then, that the first-person plural is linked to shared territory, on the one hand, and a shared patrimony, on the other. This latter sense could easily be equated, among other things, with Scruton’s idea that the national way of life derives from the settling of past disputes (encompassed by commitment to “legal and political process[es]”). In either case, the reason it is shared is because it is inherited. The idea is common to both Scruton and John Paul II. This means that there is an essential link to the past and to the idea of gift. But why is the patrimony considered more important than the territory for John Paul II? This would seem to differentiate his position from Scruton’s, for whom the commitment to the shared land is what is most fundamental in giving rise to the first-person plural.

It is, moreover, the secularity and the neutrality introduced by commitment to shared territory that guarantees the peace for Scruton. It is this that allows peoples of very different views and cultures to live side by side. It is a commitment to one another that transcends disagreements (Scruton 2019, p. 33). Yet John Paul II uses the Polish example to illustrate why he thinks the cultural is more important than the territorial: in the absence of territory (the partitions of the late eighteenth century; see Davies (2005, pp. 3–120)), Poland continued to exist. And not only exist—the nineteenth century was a time of “extraordinary

cultural maturity” for Poland, showing the “deep bond between the spiritual and the material, between culture and territory” (John Paul II 2005, p. 67).⁸

Perhaps the point is that it was precisely the loss of the territory that energised the interest in the cultural and spiritual. This would be another way of restating Scruton’s point; the absence of territory is so keenly felt because it was the territory itself that secured the cultivation of the cultural and spiritual patrimony of Poland. Resultantly, the patrimony survives in the absence of territory because of the strength of the bond created by the territory. But this is surely a moot point, for it seems equally plausible to argue that it is because of the strength and priority of the cultural and spiritual patrimony that Poland survived the loss of territory?

The effect of loss brings the question of priority forward for us, illustrating that a reduction to an either-or with respect to territory and patrimony would inadequately explain the phenomenon of their bond. The issue of loss catalyses the questions that we have about what is most fundamental and important in thinking about the first-person plural, and it needs some consideration in its own right. We will look in more detail at this idea when we consider symbolic debt. Our line of questioning so far, however, requires first a more detailed examination of John Paul II’s ideas concerning the nation.

4. John Paul II and Patriotism

An extensive treatment of John Paul II’s understanding of the nation is to be found in the book-length interview *Memory and Identity*, published in English in 2005 but recounting conversations had back in 1993. A number of important philosophical and theological themes emerge, which allow us to consider Scruton’s position from another perspective, as well as to see how much common ground there is between their respective positions.

John Paul II indicates that “patriotism” immediately introduces a “moral value” because etymologically it invokes the Fourth Commandment—to honour one’s father and mother (John Paul II 2005, p. 73).⁹ This moral dimension, however, can be seen already in his earlier considerations of certain philosophical matters relating to patriotism and its derivatives, prior to accession to the papacy (designated by reference to “Wojtyła”).¹⁰ These take the form of enduring questions about how a society relates to truth and, therefore, also to the good and to freedom. We will consider these and then look at John Paul II’s understanding of patriotism and culture, which involves more theological concerns. Finally, we will conclude this section by looking at the analogical relation that emerges between conceptions of terrestrial and heavenly “nations”, suggesting that a coincidence between the national and the credal sense of loyalty may be the strongest position provided both are properly understood and set in right relation to each other.

4.1. Initial Philosophical Considerations

John Paul II laments the loss of the traditional distinction in moral philosophy between the bonum honestum (“just good”), bonum utile (“useful good”), and bonum delectabile (“pleasurable good”). He sees in this the loss of the “ethical dimension” of freedom (John Paul II 2005, p. 37), which is to say the right understanding and use of freedom. He is concerned with the pertinent questions arising from the atrocities of the twentieth century in the curtailment and thus skewing of freedom, on the one hand, and the question of how a nation whose peoples have regained their freedom understand and use it, on the other. The latter question pertains naturally to the fact that the *Memory and Identity* conversations occurred only a couple of years after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

What John Paul II laments is the near total erasure of the bonum honestum in favour of “utility or pleasure” (John Paul II 2005, p. 38). The extreme foregrounding of the bonum utile here coincides with Scruton’s critique of homo oeconomicus and the Soviet Union in terms

of ordering everything according to its usefulness in advancing socialism. This is resisted in Scruton's analysis of the first-person plural, where stress is placed on non-purposive activities or, to use Oakeshott's term, "civil association". This point has the additional effect of returning us to the *bonum honestum* in that non-purposive activities draw the citizen towards things which are good in themselves and not things chosen principally for their usefulness. We might note that this encourages the appreciation or pursuit of actual *bona honesta* (e.g., knowledge, friendship, God).¹¹ The shape or form of appreciating things non-purposively is itself a positive disposition to the *bonum honestum*—a notion of the good pursued for its own sake.

At the same time, John Paul II has concern for the *bonum delectabile*, which he sees as the temptation of those, freed from the constraints of a totalitarian regime, who mistake freedom for nothing more than a freedom to choose regardless of whether the object of the act is good or not (see the "developed meaning" of freedom in [Spinello \(2024, p. 375\)](#)). One sees therefore the extreme of the *bonum utile* in Communist ideology and the extreme of the *bonum delectabile* in the destabilisation among those emancipated from the former.

This is not a dismissal of the *bonum utile* and *bonum delectabile*—the useful and pleasurable; rather, it is a concern for the eclipsing of the *bonum honestum*, which causes the other two forms of the good to come unmoored and run to their distorted extreme. This could mean that without the *bonum honestum*, we suffer the difficulty of being at best only precariously committed to non-purposive arrangements. But the relationship is doubtless reciprocal: the *bonum honestum* orients us to a life that values non-purposive arrangements, and non-purposive arrangements orient us to the idea of the *bonum honestum*.¹²

This necessarily also impacts our understanding of persons in Wojtyła's personalism. To be consistent with the idea of non-purposive activities, the first-person plural cannot devolve persons into singular Cartesian subjects any more than non-contractual obligations can be said to inculcate tyrannical vassal relations.

Whilst with Kant there is the repudiation of sheer utility and instead a focus on duty and obligation, John Paul II nevertheless notes that Kant "does not return to the tradition of the *bonum honestum*" ([John Paul II 2005, p. 40](#)). This is a crucial and perceptive point to make. It highlights how repudiating utility as a dominant force whilst emphasising duty and obligation can result in a *bonum apparens* ("apparent good") that falls short of the full moral good. One could even be tempted to read Scruton's understanding of the first-person plural in this etiolated way.¹³

In making his point about Kant, John Paul II is highlighting a certain temptation that may belie an ostensibly good orientation to the nation and patriotism. The temptation is to evacuate the *bonum honestum* and then confuse the remaining superficial appearance for real patriotism (nationalism is one example that fits this picture). Appearances, we may add, are reinforced when the national culture in question itself contains the tradition of the *bonum honestum*, as is the case in any nation whose culture extends back into the European Middle Ages.¹⁴ We may further note that, however much one seeks to distinguish nationalism from patriotism, it is important that patriotism is not emptied of positive meaning. The dominant force shaping the definition often seems to be that it is "not nationalism"—a temptation, perhaps, when one reads papal documents referring to patriotism or nationalism.¹⁵ In the tradition, John Paul II's thought stands demarcated as a fuller exploration of the positive value of patriotism.

This question of the *bonum honestum*, and therefore of the place of truth in the formation of the first-person plural, is tied to the matter of freedom (Wojtyła develops the idea of "participation" to explain how this takes place; see [Panasiak 2024, pp. 119, 122](#)).¹⁶ Are we free to pursue the truth? This might be a question that a people ask themselves. Similarly, are we free only when we can pursue what we will? These two questions

reflect the two situations of the twentieth century for those who experienced totalitarian governments as well as liberation from them. Both are ways into the question of what freedom is.

John Paul II highlights the case of Poland to show not only the difficulties arising from the abuse of freedom but also what happens when that freedom is regained but not put to its proper use. Resistance was “a matter of instinct or intuition, although at the same time it prompted a deeper reflection on the religious and civil values motivating their resistance [...]” (John Paul II 2005, p. 50). Here we see the two kinds of operation of the first-person plural that Scruton highlights, as we noted earlier: the “instinctive and personal” (Scruton 2019, p. 20), the former being a matter of attachments deeper than reason, the latter being a rational determination of what is demanded in the moral life.

The point leads John Paul II to consider the remark of a friend regarding the distinction between Eastern and Western Europe: Poland was able to withstand trials and difficulties in a way that Western Europe would not have been. This large statement, if true, appears rooted in the benefits of a developed first-person plural which, moreover, is secured and not loosened by Christian faith. If it is true that Western Europe could not have survived the trials, John Paul II thinks, it is because there is an “insistent return of the denial of Christ” in the West (John Paul II 2005, p. 52). He points to the West’s “attempts to impose its own conditions on developing countries”, to which “one may legitimately ask whether this is not another form of totalitarianism, subtly concealed under the appearances of democracy” (John Paul II 2005, pp. 52–53). If that is so, it must be, on his earlier analysis, owing to an abuse of freedom which has severed the link between freedom and truth. Surely a society which has lost the *bonum honestum* as a proper understanding of the good is going to find any association of freedom with truth difficult.

It is in turning to revelation that John Paul II sees the completion of our understanding of freedom. To “love God and neighbour” is what shows that “freedom is for love” (John Paul II 2005, p. 44).¹⁷ Sacrifice for the sake of others thus becomes the highest expression of freedom. For John Paul II, this serves as a theological rationale for the self-sacrificial disposition induced by the first-person plural in the form of national loyalty. It is here that we find a parallel to Scruton’s grounds for love of the stranger. Moreover, this “freedom for love” confounds and allows one to escape the clutches of all forms of “social utilitarianism” (both Marxism and National Socialism/Fascism) (John Paul II 2005, p. 46), to which one might add John Paul II’s other consideration: the approach to freedom following the downfall of such social utilitarianisms. The idea that freedom is for love is a moral point, and therefore, we see the return of the *bonum honestum* (as opposed to freedom as sheer pursuit of the will and pleasure).

Supplementing the forms of social utilitarianism, we might also propose to include societies that now find themselves prey to the same temptation faced by post-communist societies, even though they have not experienced such regimes themselves. A breakdown of the first-person plural, which is otherwise open to moral truth, may help account for this phenomenon. Wherever there is the “abuse of freedom”, John Paul II says, there is the “[provocation of] a reaction which takes the form of one totalitarian system or another” (John Paul II 2005, p. 47). Though aimed primarily at those freedom-abusing social utilitarianisms of the twentieth century, John Paul II’s words may prove prescient in those societies which have crept toward the abuse of freedom in the form of the absolute liberty to choose (the *bonum delectabile* as detached from the *bonum honestum*).

Now, crucially, John Paul II defines freedom for love in terms of being both a “gift” from the Creator and a “task” (John Paul II 2005, p. 46). As a task it concerns the correct *use* of freedom to pursue the truth (the *bonum honestum*). But we might consider the task also from the perspective of the freedom to love in the first-person plural, namely, love

expressed through the non-contractual obligations and non-purposive activities that form the first-person plural. Non-contractual obligations require sacrifice from the individual—sacrifices that could only be construed as forced or burdensome by distorting the meaning of freedom. Non-purposive activities emphasise the appreciation of the good for its own sake and so offer a means of exercising freedom that is not simply an adjunct to the use of freedom for the pursuit of truth.

As a gift, freedom causes us to consider the matter of inheritance and bequest. This can be seen from two perspectives: on the one hand, the gift of God to human nature as revealed, and thus gifted both to the individual and to humanity as a whole; on the other hand, the gift as inherited through social patrimony—the settled way of life in which freedom can be passed on to future generations. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but it is worth highlighting that the second means can allow one to speak of the gift of freedom without reference to God, or even with reference to God but only in a poetic or non-metaphysical sense.

Now, gift and inheritance are not precisely the same thing, but to begin to think about freedom in terms of divine gift does lead into the question of inheritance and the debt it incurs. Debt here is not a negative word and belongs to the forms of exchange we see in non-contractual obligations. A gift or an inheritance incurs a debt of gratitude, for instance, which is a form of non-contractual obligation.

The relation between debt and inheritance requires more careful consideration, and we will return to it after a fuller exposition of John Paul II's understanding of "nation". In the first instance we will consider his personalism as foundational to his understanding of community (which I equate with the first-person plural) and then consider his more developed theological reflections on the nature of the nation. This will then return us to the concept of inheritance with a developed appreciation of its contours in John Paul II's thought.

4.2. *Wojtyła's Personalism and the First-Person Plural*

Any consideration of John Paul II's developed views about the nation and patriotism must be prefaced by at least a mention of his personalistic philosophy, substantially developed prior to his papacy, and the effect it has on those views. The theme of the "community" is advanced towards the end of his book *The Acting Person* and developed later in an article written in 1976 entitled "The Person: Subject and Community".¹⁸ This essay in particular contributes an understanding that we may associate with the idea of the first-person plural.

Before any comment is possible on the philosophical and theological understanding of the "nation" as a cultural, territorial, and political entity as nation-state, Wojtyła summarises and extends his philosophical understanding of the "person" in the 1976 article. Beginning therefore with a reflection on the I-Thou relationship, we might identify a few threads which run through to what we are continuing to call the first-person plural.

Wojtyła shows that the self-reflexive nature of the "I" formed in relation to the "Thou" results in a possibility for "self-transcendence" (Wojtyła 1979b, p. 285).¹⁹ The acting subject sees not only a "Thou" to whom he/she relates but also sees him/herself as a "Thou" to another "I". This self-transcendence is part of the dynamic integral to what we might call the *intersubjective norm* of Wojtyła's personalism; this is the relationship which grounds all other considerations. This self-transcendence both sharpens the *ethical* dimension of intersubjectivity and orients the individual towards acting together with others (see also Pembroke 2019, p. 3).²⁰ Bringing these two dimensions together allows Wojtyła to think about the common good.²¹ Nevertheless, it is important to note that although the intersubjective norm grounds the interpretation of the community which acts for the common good, Wojtyła does nonetheless clearly distinguish the two. The I-Thou relation

is substantial; the community relation is accidental, although it is an aggregate of many “I”s and many I–Thou relations (Wojtyła 1979b, p. 289).²²

We might at this point add Wojtyła’s later thoughts (as John Paul II) on the *bonum honestum*, outlined in the previous section (problems in the community and distortions of freedom issuing from its neglect). However, we note that already in the 1976 article, Wojtyła makes reference to it:

Self-determination contained in acts, that is, in authentic human agency, indicates a different dimension of auto-teleology connected ultimately with truth and goodness in their absolute and disinterested meaning (*bonum honestum*). That is why human acts reveal the transcendence which is to a certain extent another name for the person. (Wojtyła 1979b, p. 282)

Against any biologicistic reductionism, the self-transcendence of proper human intersubjectivity connects us to “truth and goodness in their absolute and disinterested meaning”. The truth must be added to the good because it is what makes the *bonum honestum* the *bonum honestum*. This prevents the Kantian scenario critiqued in *Memory and Identity*, in which the distorted interpretations of the *bonum utile* and *bonum delectabile* are eschewed, but no return to the *bonum honestum* is made. This crucial coupling of truth with goodness is what leads to the idea of the common good properly conceived. It is also worth noting from the 1976 article that self-transcendence permits not only the grounds for absolute meaning, but also disinterested meaning. Pursuing the true good because it is the true good (i.e., absolute), and for its own sake (i.e., disinterestedly), is another way of expressing the Scrutonian point about non-purposive activities.

Later in the article Wojtyła makes the link between self-transcendence, a relation to the *bonum honestum*, and the community that forms around the pursuit of the common good:

Objectively, transcendence is realized in the relation to truth and to good, as to the “true” or “honest” good [*bonum honestum*]. This relation to the common good, which unites many subjects into one “we,” should also be founded on the relation to truth and to “true” or “honest” good, for only then does the right standard of the common good appear. (Wojtyła 1979b, p. 300)

It now becomes clear how the intersubjective norm grounds the community (the *communio personarum*) which Wojtyła calls, variously, the “pattern ‘we’” or “social community” (Wojtyła 1979b, pp. 297–302). The relation to the first-person plural here hardly needs stating. What is crucial is the emphasis on the link to the common good and, therefore, the natural law.²³ It is clear that the intersubjective norm characterises the relations between persons in a “we” community, and it is only out of this, Wojtyła thinks, that a successful nation can arise. It is for this reason that Wojtyła naturally turns to the paradigms of the couple (an I–Thou dyad), then the family (a triangulation and thus a rudimentary community), followed by the nation, and finally humanity as a whole (Wojtyła 1979b, p. 300).

Wojtyła’s thought runs as follows: malformations of the I or the I–Thou intersubjective norm disrupt self-transcendence. Two things ensue: (a) the formation of communities suffer (from families to nations), and (b) it becomes difficult to recognise and assent to the *bonum honestum* that forms the common good. This makes the formation of any community precarious in its commitment to the proper common good (hence distortions of freedom). But at that point we may insert John Paul II’s later reflection: the lack of personal assent to the *bonum honestum* makes the *bonum utile* and *bonum delectabile* drift to distorted extremes. We may suppose that if the family is an outgrowth of a well-formed I–Thou relation, the nation is a furthering of the same. That nation, properly so-formed, will then be open to the good of humanity as a whole because it is structured by self-transcendence

(i.e., it will be a patriotism and not a nationalism).²⁴ If I close myself off, I do not experience self-transcendence. Nationalism is just a nation that closes itself off to otherness (except by way of aggression), reflecting the closed-off “I”. In the same way, we may ask whether patriotism is a reflection of good I–Thou relations for Wojtyła. It would make sense in Wojtyła’s context, but it does not strictly follow inevitably (logically) from what he says here. As pope he will, in *Centesimus annus* (1991), bring forward the idea of the nation and the homeland as something that “helps a person to be the subject of social life” (Grzybowski 2020, pp. 21–22).

These observations help determine the conditions for a stable social community or “we” as such, rather than specifically determining the type of community that forms, notwithstanding the brief reference to family and nation. It is Scruton’s analysis that sheds further light on different types of loyalty that can form the first-person plural. It would require further analysis to establish whether there is any intrinsic philosophical link between the intersubjective norm and national loyalty specifically. To put this another way, and as a question: are tribal and credal forms of loyalty variations of or malformations in the application of the intersubjective norm to a social community? Although we cannot answer this question here, we can reasonably conclude that the sort of first-person plural Wojtyła has in mind is not in the first instance national, tribal, or credal, but firmly structured by a common ethical desire to act in the common good. He will personally favour patriotism as a virtuous expression of this desire, but it might be philosophically expedient to delimit Wojtyła’s first-person plural as a condition for the national, in apposition to Scruton’s territorial loyalty as creative of the first-person plural (some aforementioned ambivalence on Scruton’s part notwithstanding).

4.3. *Patrimony Both Philosophical and Theological*

Having established briefly the phenomenological and personalist account of the first-person plural for Wojtyła, we return to the question of inheritance in the context of nationhood. This is seen clearly when John Paul II says that “[t]he native land (or fatherland) can in some ways be identified with patrimony, that is, the totality of goods bequeathed to us by our forefathers” (John Paul II 2005, p. 65). He will go on to identify “spiritual patrimony”, specifically, as something transmitted maternally.

The concept of “native land” for John Paul II is something more than the territory, but it is certainly shaped by that. The territory is the “heritage” of the people who call it home, but it also includes the “whole patrimony derived from that heritage”, by which he means “the values and the spiritual content that go to make up the culture [. . .]” (John Paul II 2005, pp. 65–66). This is because a “true” or “complete culture” reflects the whole human person, who is a spiritual being (see Lesomar 2024, p. 111). All that is derived from the patria is more important than the land itself, as we have seen previously in John Paul II’s discussion of Poland in the nineteenth-century.

It is clear from this picture that although John Paul II’s position is similar to that of Scruton’s, there is a difference in patriotic emphasis. Whilst for Scruton it is the territory itself that secures the first-person plural of a nation and the loyalties and sacrifices that go with it, the culture (values and spiritual content) has a place of particular importance for John Paul II. To be clear, this is a matter of emphasis; both think territory and patrimony important. Nevertheless, does this in fact push John Paul II’s position more into the place of a credal loyalty over a national loyalty?

Whilst it is true that the specifically Christian approach extends out to the universal rather than remaining only at the particular (national) level, the division is not straightforward (John Paul II 1995, p. 4). It is not that the kind of loyalty that John Paul II has in mind is credal, but it does draw strength from its orientation to the truth (*bonum honestum*) as a

social bond. This dispassionate orientation to absolute truth and goodness (see Section 4.2) could be mistaken for a credal position. The bond is of course universal and stands above culture, belonging as it does to the natural law.²⁵ Nevertheless, John Paul II does want to draw out the various responsibilities of those who, responding to the gift of faith, are entrusted with the Gospel. This he calls the “*Veritatis diaconiam*” (“*diakonia of truth*”) (John Paul II 1999, no. 2, p. 6), which has two dimensions: causing the faithful to partake of the quest for truth made by society at large and compelling the faithful to proclaim known truths (John Paul II 1999, no. 2, p. 6).²⁶ This echoes the communal search for truth mentioned in *Gaudium et spes* (Second Vatican Council 1965a, no. 16). The same thought might also be presented in terms of Scruton’s idea of settling disputes in first-person plural communities. There is nevertheless a tension that exists between a commitment to the natural law in political life and freedom of belief. Whilst Catholicism affirms the place of the Church and the faithful in advocating for politics that respects the natural law, it is Scruton’s position that explicitly considers what allows people to live in a neighbourly fashion despite differences between them of this and (almost) every other kind. The answer is, he thinks, that the national loyalty (i.e., a stable first-person plural) takes precedence over credal loyalty, and this is what allows for peaceful coexistence and political difference.

What complicates matters in thinking about the relationship between John Paul II’s and Scruton’s perspectives is the place that Christianity has in the formation of the kinds of successful nation-states that Scruton has in mind. Whilst he thinks that the English case is particularly instructive because it subjugated credal loyalty to national loyalty in the creation of the Church of England (this being an instance of the settling of a dispute), Christianity is nonetheless inextricably linked both to the formation of English patrimony (values and spiritual content) and the secular political and legal structures that Scruton celebrates. The subjugation here is, in Scruton’s view, essentially the idea that religion of this particular kind is the product of the first-person plural arrangement rather than its foundation.

What Scruton’s view seems on occasion to presuppose, however, is the essential absence of a theology of “nation” in Christianity (Scruton 2002, p. 39).²⁷ This is not a reference to the highly contested question of the relationship between church and state and the various historical situations this debate has produced. It is, rather, the idea that the Gospel itself contains “the most profound elements of a theological vision of both native land and culture” (John Paul II 2005, p. 68). If the case of Islam allows Scruton to easily delineate between the sacred and the secular, Christianity does not. If there are theological reasons for a secular state, the ground shifts from the question of national or credal loyalty to possibilities of national and credal loyalty. This is notwithstanding Scruton’s admission that it is possible to have both, but only insofar as they are nested (i.e., not in conflict), and the national wins out in matters of dispute.

4.4. Temporal Versus Eschatological Homeland

For John Paul II, “the Gospel gave a new meaning to the concept of native land” (John Paul II 2005, p. 69). This striking admission contains the matter of inheritance and introduces an eschatological dimension to the idea of native land. The idea is that the patrimony of the native land is a temporal inheritance, but that our understanding of this is transformed by Christ’s introduction of an “eschatological dimension” that nevertheless “took nothing away from its temporal content” (John Paul II 2005, p. 69). It is a matter of “orientation” from the temporal to the eschatological.²⁸

This perspective introduces an analogy between the temporal native land and the eschatological homeland, which is to say that the temporal leads to the eschatological but in a way that does not thereby suspend the need for the temporal.²⁹ This is distinct from

the idea that the temporal or the eschatological is selected to the exclusion of the other. The eschatological homeland is met in and through the temporal homeland. In this way, the complete separation of the sacred and the secular is shunned. Complete separation otherwise procures the Islamic disregard for secular law as Scruton describes it, on the one hand, and the atheistic regimes that see the necessity of absolute exclusion of the religious from the political, on the other. These are “equivocal” perspectives. At the same time, the complete alignment of the sacred and the secular is equally shunned—the situation that gives rise to integralism or the religious state, on the one hand, or the divinisation of the nation into a nationalism, on the other. These are “univocal” perspectives. John Paul II’s view, however, would rightly be categorised as “analogical”. One example serves to demonstrate what this can mean: he thinks that the temporal and eschatological relate in self-sacrifice for the temporal homeland through the motivation of the eternal homeland (John Paul II 2005, p. 69). This also adds to his perspective regarding the sacrificial self-transcendence that permits the love of the stranger.

From this perspective we might speak about the coincidence of credal and national loyalties. Yet the Scrutonian tension is not released in this realisation. How would dispute be accounted for? What happens when the religious and the secular clash? The answer here relates to the fact that what the Church advocates is a political respect for the natural law, rather than that which is peculiar to revelation. This makes the position one of an appeal to reason, and as such, it cannot be constituted as credal loyalty. But insofar as the Christian perspective is aligned with the natural law, it is aligned with reason, and as such, its disputes with secular law-making would not constitute a religious–secular dispute or competing credal–national loyalties.

4.5. *Inheritance, Debt, and Selfishness*

It is already clear from John Paul II’s understanding of the nation that he has a keen sense of inheritance and bequest. This is also witnessed in his speaking of “gift” with respect to freedom. Morally this is reinforced by his associating piety (*pietas*) with the “fatherland” (*patria*) and the Fourth Commandment—to honour one’s father and mother (John Paul II 2005, pp. 65–66). Contained in this is the idea not only of a moral duty towards previous generations but also the acceptance of what is gifted from them in terms of inheritance. If national loyalty is imbued with this sense of morality and inheritance, it is clearly a matter of non-contractual obligations (because these things are given and not chosen) and non-purposive interests (because at least some will be *bona honesta*). John Paul II views patriotism as the disposition towards the cultural and spiritual patrimony of the nation, and using the same language as the Fourth Commandment, it is passed on to us paternally and maternally. It is important to emphasise this because it shows not only the philosophical sense of inheritance but the theological sense of paternity and maternity in the role of shaping and passing on the nation from one generation to the next (John Paul II 2005, p. 73).

Now, if we are to speak of the national patrimony (the shared history, the values, and the spiritual content) in terms of a non-contractual obligation to inheritance, then we also need to speak of debt. As this debt arises in non-contractual obligation, it cannot be a contractual form of debt—something owed in an agreed exchange. As constitutive of the first-person plural, it is part of the condition for such contractual arrangements—it gives the freedom to exercise rational, contractual agreements in a community bound by a common rule of law. The sense of debt here is not a negative imposition but, rightly understood, the subject of gratitude. A debt of gratitude is not therefore about returning some *thing* in an exchange, but an attitude or disposition towards the inheritance. This affects how the inheritance is treated.

Although the philosophical role of debt is not considered by John Paul II, it is nevertheless present by its absence in an example he gives. Speaking of the case of Poland, he states that “private interest and traditional Polish individualism have intervened as disruptive factors” (John Paul II 2005, p. 74). Selfishness, in other words, is a problem here. This has two faces. On the one hand it can be seen in nationalism, as it is the pursuit of “the good of one’s own nation alone” (John Paul II 2005, p. 75). This is the manner in which nationalism is consistently condemned by papal pronouncements. On the other hand, however, such selfish attitudes are opposed to the disposition of debt towards the national inheritance. Individualism clearly seeks to reject the idea of the first-person plural and the non-contractual obligations it incurs. This two-sided effect of selfishness is expressed eloquently in a document of the Polish Episcopal Conference (*Konferencja Episkopatu Polski* 2017). Individualism has both been “an important stimulator for social change” and driven people to “distrust a community by definition” (Bouzyk 2018, p. 93).

A final point regarding John Paul II’s view of patriotism is that the moral disposition towards the patrimony of the nation results in the view that “[c]ulture signifies cultivation” (John Paul II 2005, p. 70). We might describe this in terms of another kind of non-contractual obligation: cultural inheritance requires nurturing and permission to grow. The Christian has the duty to help remedy the ways in which culture partakes of sin (*Second Vatican Council 1965b*, no. 36; see also Grzybowski 2020, p. 22). But John Paul II’s point here really refers to the development of culture as received and the fact that cultivation (preparation of land) lies at the heart of the generative birthing of a nation—culture being an inseparable companion to loyalty to a nation. This challenges any sense in which the debt incurred by inheriting patrimony involves passive reception.

All of these points denote the national patrimony (in its origins, its development, and its transmission) as “natural” in the way the family is “natural”—ultimately a matter of fulfilment following the intersubjective norm. This matter is taken up by John Finnis:

To call the family (or with Wojtyła, [*sic*] the state) “natural” is not, primarily, to say that it exists by necessity, or by instinct or sub-rational inclination. Rather it is to say, above all, that the possibility of establishing, maintaining, and living in a family can easily be understood to be an object of choice that is desirable because fulfilling, not only as a means to other ends but in itself, inherently. (Finnis 2011, p. 128)

This analysis brings together both the aspect of Scruton’s non-contractual obligations (in the idea of sub-rational inclinations) as well as non-purposive activities (in the idea of something desirable for its own sake).³⁰ Both are conditions for the first-person plural and for the reception of patrimony as inheritance in the right disposition.

5. Symbolic Debt and Inheritance

After sustained analysis of both Scruton and John Paul II, it seems clear that questions relating to debt and inheritance are central to understanding the formation and maintenance of the first-person plural. This provides a focus for understanding the patrimony into which the first-person plural initiates one in a society whose founding loyalty is national (that is, patriotic but not nationalistic). Such analysis can be furthered by means of a reflection on the nature of debt, which is integral to the concept of inheritance.

Particularly significant in the analysis of the function of debt is the psychoanalytic thought of Jacques Lacan, which is then further developed by Massimo Recalcati with particular reference to the matter of inheritance. The theorising here can be applied to the discussion of patriotism and the first-person plural as considered so far, thereby highlighting how the disposition towards debt can assist in or threaten the maintenance of the first-person plural. Although the Lacanian idea of symbolic debt starts out as a structural

inevitability of initiation into language, through Recalcati's reflections on inheritance we may apply the idea to the reception of national patrimony (as described by Scruton/John Paul II). Far from being simply an enriching gift, there are ambiguous relations to inheritance. Inheriting is an arduous and difficult task, because it inevitably involves mourning. The structure of symbolic debt may be inevitable in terms of language, but the task of inheritance implies we have some choice with respect to the debt of national patrimony.

Among other places, Lacan treats the subject of "symbolic debt" in his text "The Freudian Thing", given as a lecture in 1955 to the Vienna Neuropsychiatric Clinic and expanded for his *Écrits* (Lacan 2006). Here, as in a number of other places, Lacan is concerned with the effects of the failure of or faltering in the paternal function as generative of (respectively) psychotic or neurotic structures. The paternal function, in Lacan's thought, refers to that which transmits the law to us and allows for desire and the law to coincide (this can be something like culture, rather than an actual person). Key to this function is castration, which means the setting of limits or saying "no", introducing thereby a lack which propels desire (see "The Symbolic Father" and "Name-of-the-Father" in Evans (1996, pp. 62, 119)). These themes are introduced because Lacan considers in this text Freud's case of the Rat Man (Freud 2001b, pp. 153–318), whose father's debts (both material and in paternal failure) are a source of "transgenerational inheritance" for the Rat Man (Johnston 2020, p. 57). The paternal function has an effect on the handling of inheritance and the debt (or lack) that comes with it.

This is helpful, as it allows us to see what happens when the paternal function of national patrimony fails (and it is perhaps worth mentioning here Scruton's idea of the function of national myths as suggestive of a similar understanding of structuration; see Scruton (2019, pp. 37–38)). It also allows us to see something of the necessity of structuration here. This is not quite to say that there exists a perfect example of paternal function, but we do nonetheless find in Lacan the affirmation of its necessity for avoiding problems of one kind or another.

In the case of selfishness, as previously mentioned, or the breakdown in the I–Thou intersubjective norm (of which selfishness would be one instance), there might be reason to think that the failure of some paternal function or other is responsible for egoic or superegoic forms of compensation. These compensations would distort the nature of the I–Thou and the "we" of the first-person plural. As Johnston comments on Lacan's piece:

[W]hen extra-psychical reality insufficiently imposes imperatives and rules, intrapsychical life will overcompensate for this insufficiency. This overcompensation substitutes for absent or lacking external authority the monstrous avatar of an excessively harsh, overbearing, and dictatorial internal agency. (Johnston 2020, pp. 59–60)

Such is the possibility resulting from failures in the paternal function. But our concern here is less with the problems issuing from the failures of or equivocations in the paternal function than it is with its structural inevitability and relation to questions of inheritance and debt. The national patrimony has a paternal function. It sets limits, it contains law and a positive desire for it. For anyone within a nation it is inescapable, either inducing embrace or rejection by its heirs.

Lacan would end his small section on "symbolic debt" by way of a comment on the medieval maxim "adaequatio rei et intellectus" (the correspondence of the intellect to reality). As rei is "in the genitive", it implies a sense of obligation—the intellect must correspond to the way reality is, not the other way around. Yet Lacan is not only interested in this genitive sense of obligation. He plays on the fact that rei is also the genitive of reus, meaning "the accused, and metaphorically the one who has incurred a debt" (Lacan 2006, p. 361; see also the helpful commentary in Johnston (2020, p. 61)). It is not meant

as a serious interpretation of the maxim; rather, it is to evoke the idea that there is a debt incurred by being a “subject of speech”. As subjects of speech (i.e., language-using human beings), we are all born into matrices of language and meaning which pre-exist us, and we inherit this language at the cost, in Lacan’s terms, of symbolic castration. There has to be a correspondence between us and language, as there has to be between the intellect and reality. If “successful”, a symbolic debt to language appears. This debt is needed for desire to arise.

The debt incurred by inheritance in this picture is, nonetheless, rather negatively portrayed. Lacan’s point about *reus* invokes the man in the dock, accused of a crime. Whilst this might lean into common neurotic or psychotic implications of initiation into the matrices of language, it is not strictly necessary. Structurally, the inheritance and debt are inevitable, and problems with the process of inheritance make for its own set of problems. Yet even from the perspective of the right reception of inheritance, it is a painful and arduous matter—it is a painful but necessary effect of castration.

Recalcati stands out as addressing the matter of inheritance and debt positively. He does not deny the difficulty, but he does have a greater concern for the way in which inheritance ought to be received. This relates to a series of insights that shed light on the matters considered so far in relation to the inheritance of national patrimony and its effect on the first-person plural.

First, it is worth pointing out that Recalcati refers to the entry into the symbolic order (language, society, ways of living etc.) and its ensuing debt as “the *symbolic Law of castration*” or “the *Law of the word*” (predominantly using the latter expression) (Recalcati 2019, pp. 19–20). It is referred to positively, even as the “salvation of life”, because “only the encounter with the existence of the limit and the lack can generate desire [. . .]” (Recalcati 2019, p. 20). The limit and lack here is the castrating effect of the paternal function. It rescues us from what Recalcati refers to as the “neurotic cult of sacrifice”, on the one hand, and “deadly enjoyment” on the other (Recalcati 2019, p. 20). This latter sense is Recalcati’s main focus, and he invokes Lucretius to indicate the effect of limit and lack: it “forbids [. . .] ‘everyone from wanting everything.’” (Recalcati 2019, pp. 21–22).

This idea of “deadly enjoyment” we might equate with John Paul II’s concern for the excessive *bonum delectabile*—the possible result of a pendulum-swinging sense of liberation from the tyrannical oppression of freedom under the Soviet Union in Poland. This merely installs a new kind of distortion of true freedom, which is precisely the sense of Recalcati’s “deadly enjoyment”. To express the relation at its simplest in terms of the nation, it would be the selfishness that disowns its fate, as described by the Polish Bishops’ Conference (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2017, pp. 1–2). This allows us to venture a connection between the “neurotic cult of sacrifice” and the selfishness of nationalism, which the Bishops’ Conference document, building on the thought of John Paul II, illustrates as the reverse formation of the selfishness that characterised the disownment position. Nationalism even has a religious form, as John Paul II pointed out to the UN (John Paul II 1995, p. 4), which Scruton describes as “religious loyalty dressed up in territorial clothes” (Scruton 2006, p. 17).³¹

It is now clear that there is a connection between patriotism in the manner explored by John Paul II and what Recalcati describes about the initiation into the symbolic order. Moreover, Recalcati thinks that the imposition of limit and lack by the paternal function “introduces an exchange that lies at the basis of every possible social pact [. . .]” (Recalcati 2019, p. 22). Is this not a suitable definition of the first-person plural? This therefore demonstrates another aspect on the formation of the first-person plural not quite attended to by Scruton and John Paul II: limitation as a constitutive condition of inheritance.

Now, Recalcati understands the matter of inheritance from two perspectives: first, a stale repetition that kills that which is inherited or else ensures it remains dead; second, the freedom to use or abandon the inheritance as one wishes, which Recalcati describes as bringing “the cancellation of one’s own provenance, of one’s own roots, of the symbolic debt to the Other” (Recalcati 2019, p. 37).

Although Recalcati searches out the positive interpretation of inheritance and the castration involved in its proper reception, he nonetheless concedes that there is suffering at the heart of the project. He points out that “heir”—the one who inherits—ultimately comes from *cheros*, “meaning deserted, bare, lacking”. And so, he associates “heir” with “orphan”, for every inheritance includes with it “the incision, the separation, the trauma of the father’s abandonment” (Recalcati 2019, p. 38). This dimension can introduce, among other things, the lack that propels desire.³² This is what guarantees the dynamism of the inheritance because the inheritance is shaped and changed by the desire rather than received as a static, dead, essentially undesirable object.

As part of what is inherited is itself the restraint, the limitation, the lack, that the paternal function embodied, the change introduced to the inheritance is similarly muted, tempered, and restrained. Without this the inheritance is left to die through lack of desire, through “formal replication, as ritual repetition of the Same, crushing it through pure conservation of the past [...] cloning it, preserving and thus killing it” (Recalcati 2020, p. 23). Alternatively, it is thrown out, refused, or unrecognisably altered in a flurry of “free” self-expression, because to refuse it is to refuse the castration that makes it inheritable in the first place. In terms of the first-person plural of national loyalty, the relation between generations involves gifting a patrimony to future generations. That presupposes limit and restraint by neither neglecting nor wantonly squandering what is to be given through inheritance. If one of the things contained in the inheritance is the restraint, the limit, what Recalcati refers to as the father’s willing “loss of his own enjoyment” (Recalcati 2019, p. 27), then neglecting or squandering the inheritance is bound to be excessive. Both approaches are problematic because they refuse the symbolic debt incurred by inheriting. As such Recalcati thinks that, however else one may describe what such persons are doing, they are not inheriting. This is true even in the case of the passive reception and subsequent repetition which appears to be faithful inheritance.

What does proper inheritance look like? Recalcati quotes Goethe’s *Faust*, just as Scruton does, and just as Freud does in his *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*: “Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast, Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen”—“What you have inherited from your forefathers, earn it, that you might own it” (Scruton 2006, p. 5; Freud 2001a, p. 207). And although John Paul II does not quote this, it certainly captures the sentiments of “gift” as well as “task” that we identified earlier. This sentiment from Goethe is what Recalcati calls the “subjectivization of the debt” (Recalcati 2019, p. 117); the fact that passive reception is not inheriting, and that some appropriation, some “reclamation” of the inheritance must be made. There is a danger, otherwise, in respect of the past: that it “give rise to a melancholy fixation that ends up rescinding the plasticity of the drive” (Recalcati 2019, p. 123). Presumably, if that fixation is then expressed as a religious impulse with respect to the national patrimony, one creates the perfect storm for nationalism.

No longer is symbolic debt simply a matter of assuming the unbearable weight of paternal debts (material or otherwise, as in the case of the Rat Man). Recalcati is redefining symbolic debt as the loss that procures the inheritance, and the question is then as much to do with mourning as it is anything else (see also “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning, but Admitting Loss”, the final chapter in Scruton 2019). As such Recalcati thinks mourning is an “exercise of memory that allows us to reach a state of forgetting that is different from the one that would like to cancel out the past [...] it is not repression” (Recalcati 2019,

p. 124). We need not concern ourselves with exploring the full meaning of this idea here, but suffice it to note that Recalcati suggests that neglecting/refusing or perhaps, we might add, mindless squandering (as a way of forgetting) is an act of repression, a refusal to mourn.³³ Yet equally, a “veneration of the past is an illness of memory and it is [...] a failure of inheritance.” (Recalcati 2019, p. 124). Each problem is found in the “cancellation of the symbolic debt that accompanies our provenance from the Other” (Recalcati 2019, p. 127). Correctly inheriting the national patrimony, we may say, means neither melancholic fixation (which would mean the loss of oneself) (Recalcati 2019, p. 131) nor neglect or refusal (which would be the repression of mourning).

Why is this understanding of inheritance so key? The first-person plural, as we have seen, involves not only a relation to our fellow human beings with whom we share a territory—a home—presently; it also considers our forebears and future generations who have called and will call, equally, this place their home. Intergenerational relations are a natural site of non-contractual obligations—looking after one’s parents, raising one’s children, to name only a few. The passing of generations is the transference of inheritance and a breakdown in the first-person plural between those generations can take the forms Recalcati describes. If it was clear that the rejection of the patrimony is problematic for the formation or sustenance of the first-person plural, it is now clear that mere fixation on the past, or blindly seeking to reproduce it, is also a threat to inheritance. The gift must be received as a task, as John Paul II pointed out, and this task for Recalcati is “subjectivization” of the gift. But it also needs to correctly mourn the loss intrinsic to inheritance. To inherit, generations must pass away. Recalcati shows how that loss can paralyse us—preventing us carrying out the task that receiving the gift requires. On the one hand, paralysis comes through melancholic fixation, which preserves the inheritance but refuses to let it give rise to desire that might carefully reform it and thus keep it alive. It inadvertently stifles the transmission of the very desire, the energy, that created and shaped the patrimony. On the other hand, paralysis comes through refusing the gift, which might mean deliberately dismantling it, which is a repression of the mourning.

Whilst both outcomes are a temptation for any society, Recalcati concerns himself most of all with the refusal of the gift. What this does, he argues, is produce “frustrated attachment filled with rage. Hate impedes separation and becomes a kind of indestructible bond” (Recalcati 2019, p. 137). Much more could be said in respect of current manifestations of precisely this, but perhaps we might find here the seeds of a solution whilst at the same time seeking to avoid the rise of its melancholic opposite.

6. Conclusions

Scruton’s philosophy of the first-person plural has a number of important connections to John Paul II’s sense of community. Scruton approaches the emergence of the first-person plural from three perspectives of loyalty (national, tribal, and credal). Advocating for the national, he argues that a communal commitment to territory (a home) arises especially where one finds a preponderance of non-contractual obligations and non-purposive activities. Both help found and maintain the intersubjectivity of the first-person plural, on which the peaceful political life of a nation rests.

John Paul II, on the other hand, approaches the development of the community from the phenomenological–personalist perspective, in which the “we” is patterned after true I–Thou intersubjective relations. The orientation to the common good is made possible, however, only when this “we” community is dedicated to the *bonum honestum*. Without the *honestum* one risks distorting the otherwise real goods of the *bonum utile* and *bonum delectabile*. These distortions express themselves in a rewriting of freedom. Freedoms vanish when the increasingly totalitarian state imposes the goals of its ideology, necessitating

that everything become useful to its attainment. Freedom remains detached from the just good when, in liberation from totalitarian restriction, a society pursues pleasure without any concern for what is truly good. And so, without this idea of the just good, there cannot be a proper relation to the common good, from which we otherwise obtain the family and the nation.

John Paul II's identification of the necessity of the *bonum honestum* importantly expands the Scrutonian reflection on non-contractual obligations and non-purposive activities. It makes clear the necessary orientation towards truth any society must have in order to successfully build and maintain a first-person plural. John Paul II points to the (Kantian) fact that duty or obligation (over pleasure) and concern for other persons as ends (over means) can be achieved without reference to the *bonum honestum*. In another register: non-contractual obligations and non-purposive activities could be separated from *bona honesta*. If this were the case, they would not contribute to the proper first-person plural because they would lack any guarantee against distortions of freedom. One can effectively maintain appearances whilst carrying the conditions for the abuse of freedom. Only by means of a self-transcending pattern (the I–Thou relation) can a person turn to the just good and so on to the common good of society. Yet, an encouragement to non-contractual obligations and non-purposive activities clearly moves the mind in the direction of self-transcending truths, with existential responsibilities to others and the good pursued for its own sake.

At the same time, Scruton's analysis of different types of loyalty allows us to see the precise philosophical nature of the first-person plural and how to distinguish between the different types that can arise (national, tribal, credal). One can derive from Scruton as much as from John Paul II the fact that many forms of the first-person plural exist. These include those aforementioned, which have the surface features of an orientation to the common good (e.g., customs of duty and care for others but bereft of the mooring provided by the *bonum honestum*). It also includes those that effectively use national loyalty as a mask for another kind of loyalty (e.g., nationalism—in fact a form of tribal or credal loyalty—which gets confused with patriotism), as both Scruton and John Paul II point out.

John Paul II's reflections on the nation in *Memory and Identity* show how compatible his view is with Scruton's understanding of the first-person plural. It is clear that what is advocated by John Paul II is not a credal form of loyalty when thinking about the nation. His position does, however, clearly point towards a common good structured according to the natural law. As such, John Paul II sees as coextensive the philosophical and theological considerations of the nation when viewed from the Christian perspective. For this reason, it becomes possible to speak of some relation between the credal and the national that involves neither the temptation to theocracy or integralism, on the one hand, nor any exclusionary relationship between religion and public life, on the other. Whilst the Christian vision informs Scruton's position to a large degree, John Paul II's is more optimistic about the possibilities of a shared pursuit of truth with one's neighbour.

The focus of a first-person plural on a nation means, for Scruton as much as for John Paul II, the shared territory that is home, the shared history and culture, the customs and values and spiritual heritage of the *patria*. It is, in other words, a patrimonial body of material and immaterial composition. This patrimony is inherited by the first-person plural community. It imposes on that community a great wealth, but as with any inheritance, a weighty debt also. How are we to make sense of the first-person plural in terms of this inheritance and debt?

Non-contractual obligations allow us to inherit the patrimony without seeing it as an imposed burden from the past. Concern for the dead and for the unborn generations to come is the natural disposition of one who is comfortable with non-contractual obliga-

tions. The wealth brought by the inheritance might presume a positively inflected debt of gratitude. But Recalcati makes us aware of another dimension: the loss at the heart of inheritance. All inheritance involves mourning; a paternal death is inscribed in inheriting. Exploring this dimension adds something fundamentally important to the question of the maintenance of the first-person plural, as it moves between generations. In this we find another means of interpreting problems in the first-person plural.

Another kind of masquerade shows itself at this juncture. Faithful inheritance of a patrimony by a community can look like real inheritance. But Recalcati shows that any seemingly faithful inheriting can mask a “melancholic fixation” on the past. It is a problem with mourning, thwarting the task of inheritance. It is an effective way to kill the patrimony, for it sees inheritance as mere repetition and cloning of the past. Recalcati likens this to the temple priests’ relation to the Law.

In contrast to this picture is the more common refusal to engage with any inheritance. Recalcati sees this as yet another issue with mourning. It refuses, he thinks, to acknowledge the “symbolic debt” incurred by inheritance. To this we may add the squandering of inheritance or changing it to something unrecognisable, both as means of escaping its demands. This has any number of implications, including irreversible ones for future generations. This position seems to stand in some relation to the distorting excess of the *bonum delectabile*, either in the squandering, the changing, or the self-liberating refusal of the inheritance. This is what Recalcati calls “deadly enjoyment”.

John Paul II had pointed out that freedom is revealed not only as a gift but also as a task. A free community does not simply inherit freedoms but enacts them and maintains them in particular ways. So, the inheritance of the patrimony involves reception as gift but also as task. Similarly, true inheritance for Recalcati means a “subjectivization” of the gift, a task that allows the cultivation of the gift (keeping it alive and transmitting it) whilst not being overwhelmed by the loss, the debt, incurred by inheriting. It is in fact the loss that drives desire forward, preventing any stagnation. At the same time, it is a task that withstands the temptation to flee the demands of the loss. Subjectivization is described as a difficult and arduous task, but one which is certainly commensurate with the analyses of Scruton and John Paul II. It even seems possible to read the loss of territory in John Paul II’s analysis of Poland as the kind that catapults desire. In other words, why Polish culture was not only able to survive but to flourish in the absence of territory during the nineteenth century.

Unresolved remains the question of whether Scruton actually thinks the first-person plural to be formed pre-politically or during the political process. But for John Paul II the situation is clear in respect of the personalist I–Thou intersubjective norm that structures society. What is not fully clear is whether national loyalty follows from this necessarily or only incidentally. It is clear, at least, that his view does not constitute a credal loyalty position. The theological considerations, however, do procure a position of coincidence between credal and national loyalties, perhaps best described as analogical. The analogical avoids the equivocal and univocal positions described. We may venture to suggest that Recalcati’s “subjectivization”, offering us an explanation of inheritance through mourning, is similarly analogical. I submit that viewing matters through these three personages helps clarify and diagnose problems in the first-person plural and the inheritance of national patrimony.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- 1 For a helpful overview of Wojtyła's personalism in a philosophical context, showing in particular its use of phenomenology, see (Hołub 2023).
- 2 For an introduction to theories of consent, drawing also on Scruton, see (Pitt 2023, pp. 9–23).
- 3 Suissa argues that "Scruton can be criticised for his unreflective use of the first-person plural (the terms 'our country', 'our civilisation' do not appear in inverted commas in his text), and for the exclusion, by definition, of anyone who does not share his conception of 'our country'." (Suissa 2021, p. 855). This invokes the "first-person plural" idea, but not, it seems to me, in the terms Scruton himself uses. It should be clear from this present article that the "first-person plural" is a developed philosophical idea in Scruton's works, even if not fully by 1993, when the central article under Suissa's consideration was written (Scruton 1993). The objection of possible "uncritical attachments" (Suissa 2021, p. 855), arising from Scruton's arguments in favour of patriotism, closely resembles Scruton's stress on non-contractual obligations. Scruton's critique of Hobbes shows how such obligations are reasonable, whereas the rationalistic individualism behind social contract theories already presumes the kinds of attachments Scruton seeks to emphasise. In short, Scruton sees critics, or would-be critics, of his position to already be too "downstream" of his more foundational concerns. Recalcati's perspective on inheritance, considered later in this present article, helpfully demonstrates the essentially turbulent nature of inheritance and the difficult task of what he terms "subjectivization". This, I argue, augments Scruton's and Wojtyła/John Paul II's positions.
- 4 For a history of the development of homo oeconomicus from Xenophon on, see (Wilson and Dixon 2012).
- 5 It should not go unnoticed that to consider such obligations "transcendent" is to invoke a position similar to Wojtyła's "self-transcendence", required for the formation of a family, a nation, and a full culture. Whether self-transcendence for Wojtyła emerges first in the context of I–Thou relations, or in the individual's relation to God, is moot (see the mystical dimension as highlighted by Modrzejewski 2021, p. 5). Scruton's early position takes into account the "third-person perspective" to contrast (and establish) the "first-person perspective", which later develops into his understanding of the first-person plural (Hörcher 2023, p. 67; see also Cullen 2016, pp. 263–66).
- 6 It is also worth noting that Wojtyła's student, Tadeusz Styczeń, develops the personalist emphasis on "affirming the other for themselves" to show that to fail in this is to fail both in self-discovery and in the perception of difference (see Wojtyła 2023, p. 75). This is significant, for without the self-transcending I–Thou relation, there cannot be a community with any difference or diversity.
- 7 Wojtyła developed an understanding of the "culture of human works" and the "culture of person" as two distinct considerations that allow us to see more clearly the link between the nature of the human person in metaphysical, phenomenological, and personalist terms and the generation of culture. On this view "a human being is the subject and goal of culture, while the products of human creation should radiate and correspond to human nature" (Lesomar 2024, p. 109).
- 8 For a brief and helpful overview of Polish history in relation to Wojtyła's considerations, as well as his own contribution to Polish culture, see (Houde 2024).
- 9 For an extended treatment of patriotism as a virtue in terms of "psychical love (patriotic feelings)", "justice (iustitia legalis)", and "piety (pietas)", including a consideration of the bonum honestum, bonum utile, and bonum delectabile tradition as found in Woroniecki, Bocheński, John Paul II and others, see (Bouzyk 2018, pp. 95–101).
- 10 I refer to Wojtyła only to properly distinguish his work prior to becoming pope. Although *Memory and Identity* is an interview conducted as pope, one might wish to distinguish this too, as it is personal rather than official. In the interests of preventing confusion, and also in respect of the bibliographical information as given, I have chosen not to distinguish between private and official in any nominal way, and so the difference between Wojtyła and John Paul II here is nothing other than a chronological distinction reflecting pre- and post-election status.
- 11 It is worth noting Spinello's point that, even if we might presume a commitment to the goods given by Aquinas, "Wojtyła never gives us a list of the bona honesta". Further consideration of possible *bona honesta* is then given (Spinello 2024, pp. 389–93).
- 12 It is worth noting that the Polish Episcopal Conference speaks of patriotism as a means of concretising moral goods so that they do not remain ideological and abstract; see (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2017).
- 13 It seems clear that Scruton's precise position on Christianity is not very easy to ascertain, subject as it is to varying degrees of committal across his works (though, without question, treated positively). I note this, as I do not wish to do an injustice to Scruton's position; nevertheless, it seems correct to point out that one could read the arguments about the first-person plural commitment to the nation in this Kantian way, and that the position of John Paul II draws us back from such a reading. For a balanced and careful account of Scruton's position on religion in relation to national loyalty, including the reconciliation of some seeming contradictions in Scruton's thought, see (Morello 2022, pp. 4–52). See also (Hörcher 2024).

- 14 Lesomar notes, in fact, that for Wojtyła, “actions directed at *bonum honestum* create true culture [...] actions that are only aimed at utilitarian goodness (*bonum utile*) or are influenced by benefits for oneself do not form a true culture; and this process is doomed to failure” (Lesomar 2024, p. 110).
- 15 Some major references can be found in (Pius XI 1922, p. 682; 1932, pp. 179–80; Pius XII 1939, p. 430; 1958, p. 606; Second Vatican Council 1965a, no. 75, p. 1098; Paul VI 1967, nos. 62–63, pp. 287–88; John Paul II 1995, p. 4; Pontifical Council for Culture 1999).
- 16 “Participation” includes a serious consideration of the relationship between the common good and the good of the individual. Individualism presumes their inevitable irreconcilability, but Wojtyła concerns himself with showing that the self-transcending is what unites the subjective good of the individual with the common good (Spinello 2024, p. 371). This invokes the same questions that arise from the tension between “physical” and “ecstatic” loves in Rousselot’s understanding of love in the Middle Ages: how does one’s own good and the good of the other coincide? Does the good of the other not require, rather, a self-destructive ecstatic love? (Rousselot 2001; see also the discussion of solidarity in Jagiełło 2023, p. 3; also see the relation to Tadeusz Styczeń’s thought in Wojtyła 2023, pp. 72–75). The good of the individual coinciding with the common good, as premised on self-transcendence and sacrifice in Wojtyła’s thought, appeals to a position beyond those considered by Rousselot. “Participation” could be considered in relation to Scruton, in that it emphasises activity over passive membership (see Espartinez 2023, p. 39). One must, however distinguish between Wojtyła’s “community of being” (in which he situates the family, nation, and state) and his “community of acting”, which differs precisely in being purposive (such as, to use Espartinez’s examples, “workers digging a trench together and students cooperating in memorizing lectures”), see (Espartinez 2023, p. 38).
- 17 This idea of freedom existing for love was developed earlier in Wojtyła’s work *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła 1981, pp. 135–39), and it is considered in relation to his thought on culture in (Houde 2024, p. 9).
- 18 See (Wojtyła 1979a, 1979b); the essay “The Person: Subject and Community” is reproduced in the first volume of the collected works, which also helpfully contains a number of other essays that are apposite to the subject; see (Wojtyła 2021). *The Acting Person* remains an influential work, especially in Poland. On the development of the notion of “participation” in Janusz Nagórny, see (Zadykiewicz 2024).
- 19 It should be noted that this translation speaks rather of the “I–you” relation, but for the purposes of invoking the wider philosophical debate surrounding this idea, I have chosen to refer to it nonetheless in terms of I–Thou.
- 20 Spinello expresses transcendence in its relation to truth and the good: “Vertical transcendence is the person’s capacity to surpass himself, to rise above rationalizations, fears, or false ambitions to choose that *bonum honestum* in the moment of truth” (Spinello 2024, p. 376).
- 21 Wojtyła concerns himself with two challenges to the common good in terms of “individualism” (erasure of the common good) and “objective totalism” (the erasure of the individual), which is treated extensively in the literature (see Espartinez 2023; see also this discussion and the creative differences between Wojtyła and Józef Tischner in Jagiełło 2023; on the complementarity of Wojtyła and Tischner and the difference in view of Levinas, see Taylor 2025).
- 22 On the specific relation of the I–Thou (or I–You) to culture, see (Panasiak 2023, pp. 172–175). Wojtyła’s thought is delineated relative to Mieczysław Krąpiec, another key figure of the Lublin School.
- 23 A consideration of the “universal form” of Wojtyła’s personalism can be found in (Modrzejewski 2021). This would seem to put Wojtyła’s position at odds with Scruton’s secular conservatism. Modrzejewski helpfully discusses universalism and pluralism, arguing that “[m]oderate universalism recognises both the pluralism of civilisations and particular cultures, as well as historical, cultural and civilisational universality (among others Coudenhove-Kalergi (1953)). This position is also typical of Polish universalist thinkers, including Karol Wojtyła i.e., John Paul II (Modrzejewski 2009).” (Modrzejewski 2021, p. 3). Particularly of interest is the way in which Modrzejewski brings out the mystical dimension of Wojtyła’s personalist philosophy and the light it sheds on the formation of Europe.
- 24 Bouzyk highlights the sociological work of Krzystofek and Szczepański, who argue that “globalisation” and “nationalism” (or “ethnocentrism”) are “paradoxically” simultaneous with “the decreasing importance of nations, their cultures, and traditions [...]” (Bouzyk 2018, p. 94).
- 25 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia-IIae, q. 94, a. 2, co. The self-evident (i.e., indemonstrable) precepts of the natural law are set out here, and it is in virtue of the fundamental orientation of man to the good that results in “*homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod in societate vivat*” (Aquinas 1892, p. 170b), “man has by natural inclination a desire to know the truth about God, and to live in society” (translation my own). It would seem from this that the first-person plural flows indemonstrably from the natural law and is connected with the pursuit of truth and the good. This is obviously a very rudimentary expression of what we see in the first-person plural as described; nevertheless, it demonstrates that it does not follow that a causal explanation of the first-person plural is necessarily needed.
- 26 “*Hoc officium, una ex parte, facit ut credens ipsa communitas particeps evadat communis illius operae qua homines attingere student veritatem; altera vero ex parte, obstringitur communitas illa officio ut nuntia fiat rerum certarum quas cognovit [...]*”, “This duty, on the one hand, makes the community of believers become a participant in that common work by which man strives to get to the truth; on the other hand, this community has the duty to proclaim the certainties it has come to know [...]

(translation my own). There is an important caveat that follows from this point in the encyclical, which acknowledges the incomplete nature of our knowledge of truths in which we nonetheless have certainty. Such is the nature of revealed knowledge and the room afforded to the development of doctrine in understanding it.

- 27 “Added to the tradition of secular law and territorial sovereignty, Christianity leads to the idea of a political order established without reference to tribe or faith, in which even the most fundamental differences can be accommodated, provided only that the territorial jurisdiction is given absolute sovereignty over those who reside within its borders.” This is a somewhat confusing admission that seems to place the ability to accommodate difference at the feet of Christianity rather than strictly the territorial loyalty of patriotism. The point about the sovereignty of the territorial jurisdiction is in keeping with Scruton’s other ideas. It still remains a question, however, whether Scruton has fully appropriated the point that Christianity gives both a “theology of nation” and a reason to submit to secular law. I consider the relation here analogical (see n. 29 below). Morello discusses Scruton’s “secular conservatism” and the fact that Scruton thinks “religion is not an appropriate unifying force for the modern nation-state” (Morello 2022, p. 12; see also Lawler 2016, pp. 256–57).
- 28 Bocheński develops the idea of the contingency of a homeland (for an English reference, see Bouzyk 2018, p. 99), which might fruitfully be considered in relation to questions of eschatology.
- 29 Calling this “analogical” I mean to deploy the understanding of Erich Przywara SJ (1889–1972) which accounts for the finding of one polarity “in-and-beyond” (in-über) the other (see Przywara 2014).
- 30 It should nevertheless be noted that it seems mistaken to say that John Paul II speaks of the *state* as natural; rather, he speaks of the “nation” as natural, distinguishing as he does between the nation and the state.
- 31 Scruton seems to equivocate between a religious sense here (implying credal loyalty) and the tribal, which is how he describes Nazism earlier. I would nonetheless consider it a moot point whether Nazism should be considered a credal or tribal form of loyalty. On the one hand, it was ideologically driven in the way that credal loyalty can be (and by the same token, Communism has the same structure). On the other hand, Nazism was fundamentally a biologicistic, racial ideology, which one could describe as a kind of tribal loyalty. On Scruton’s critique of nationalism as an ideology for conscription, see (Mahoney 2016, p. 286).
- 32 Recalcati speaks of the “Telemachus complex”, Cozzi notes, as a “model to stress the importance of agency in a son’s approach to his father” (Cozzi 2022, p. 84). In the context of inheritance, the patria, and the moral commandment to honour one’s father and mother invoked by John Paul II, the “Telemachus complex” is a fruitful addendum that develops the understanding of societal foundations and the challenges and struggles that lie at its heart.
- 33 John Paul II refers to Europeans as being “like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history” in *Ecclesia in Europa* no. 7 (John Paul II 2003, p. 654; see DeBattista 2025, pp. 5–6).

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