I Aylan Kurdi: A Case for a Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being

His name was Aylan (Alan). He was 3 years old, from war-torn Syria. His final journey was supposed to end in sanctuary in Europe; instead it claimed his life and highlighted the plight of desperate people caught in the gravest refugee crisis since World War II. The images of the child's lifeless body on a Turkish beach reverberated across the globe, stirring public outrage and embarrassing political leaders. The child
pictured facedown in red T-shirt and shorts was identified as Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian Kurd from Kobani, a town near the Turkish border that witnessed months of heavy fighting between Islamic State and Syrian Kurdish forces. He drowned after the 15-foot boat ferrying him from the Turkish beach resort of Bodrum to the Greek island of Kos capsized shortly before dawn on Wednesday, killing 12 passengers. Aylan’s 5-year-old brother, Galip, and his mother, Rehan, were also among the dead. His father, Abdullah, was the only family member to survive.

At the morgue, Mr. Kurdi described what happened after they set off from the deserted beach, under cover of darkness. “We went into the sea for four minutes and then the captain saw that the waves are so high, so he steered the boat and we were hit immediately. He panicked and dived into the sea and fled. I took over and started steering; the waves were so high the boat flipped. I took my wife in my arms and I realized they were all dead.”

Abdullah said, “My kids were the most beautiful children in the world.” He described how they woke him up every morning to play with them. He lamented how, “they are all gone now. Now all I want to do is sit next to the grave of my wife and children.” In Canada, Tima Kurdi said her brother had sent her a text message around 3 a.m. Turkish time Wednesday confirming they had set off. The next time she spoke to him, he was in shock, telling her how he fought vainly to keep his two boys alive in the water, one tucked under each arm. “They screamed ‘Daddy, please don’t die,’” she said he told her. One by one, as he realized they were dead, he closed his eyes and let go, she said. “He said, ‘I did everything in my power to save them, but I couldn’t,’”
she said, “My brother said to me, ‘my kids have to be the wake-up call for the whole world.’”

A wake-up call for what? How does Aylan ‘fit in’? How does our concept of homo politicus work in this context? Is Aylan reduced as Aristotle says to be “like an isolated piece in a game of [international] draughts”? How does the ‘part’ fit in with the ‘whole’ or the ‘whole’ with the ‘part’? These are not merely ‘theoretical’ considerations but questions concerning the realpolitik of the human person. We are obliged, as Voegelin says, just as Plato was in the Republic, into an enlargement of the actual field of investigation that correspondingly compels a theoretical reawakening in the world of the political. Voegelin explains

the categories of order developed in the Republic cannot be used in an analysis of disorder... In the Diversion, therefore appears the ‘power of Evil’ as the counterforce of the Agathon; and the paradigm of true order that is laid up in heaven is paralleled by the paradigm of ‘godless wretchedness.’

Even Aristotle was well aware of the limitations in his own analysis when he says “man is by nature a social animal” but adds “we must set some limit” because “if we extend the application to grandparents and grandchildren and friends of friends it will proceed to infinity.” Obviously, there’s an objective tragedy in Syria and then there’s considerable anti-Kurdish sentiment in Turkey. There’s even the emerging

---

2Aristotle, Politics, 1253al.
3David Walsh, Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2016), 224.
5Nicomachean Ethics, 1097b.
question among the political elites in Western Europe at least of a ‘great divorce’

between them and their own people. Noonan notes how

when the working and middle class pushed back in shocked indignation, the people on top
called them “xenophobic,” “narrow-minded,” “racist.” The detached, who made the
decisions and bore none of the costs, got to be called “humanist,” “compassionate,” and
“hero of human rights”... The larger point is that this is something we are seeing all over, the
top detaching itself from the bottom, feeling little loyalty to it or affiliation with it. It is a
theme I see working its way throughout the West’s power centers. At its heart it is not only a
detachment from, but a lack of interest in, the lives of your countrymen, of those who are not
at the table, and who understand that they've been abandoned by their leaders' selfishness
and mad virtue-signalling... power adds distance to experience. I don’t have it fully right in my
mind but something big is happening here with this division between the leaders and the led.
It is very much a feature of our age. But it is odd that our elites have abandoned or are
abandoning the idea that they belong to a country, that they have ties that bring
responsibilities, that they should feel loyalty to their people or, at the very least, a grounded
respect.⁶

All these very important and interesting questions aside, Aylan’s paradigm and his
father’s reveille for the whole of humanity can be understood, I believe, not just as a
tug on human heartstrings. The fact that we can be ‘tugged’ at all is a reflection of
the openness within us to the reality of the human person as being the very
possibility of politics.⁷ Feelings are more than feelings and cannot thereby be
reduced to mere subjective emotion.⁸ Having our hearts wrenched in seeing the little
body of Aylan on the beach with various media applications, or the photograph and
YouTube of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh in the back of an ambulance after an
airstrike in Aleppo, is a disclosure and reminder to us of what more often than not
remains hidden in politics and its discourse but which essentially presupposes its very
possibility. These cases all highlight that it’s the wealth of persons that’s the true

⁶ Peggy Noonan, ‘How Global Elites Forsake their Countrymen: Those in power see people as the bottom
as aliens whose bizarre emotions they must try to manage,’ Wall Street Journal, August 11, 2016. See also
Noonan, ‘A Wounded Boy’s Silence: ‘I hate war,’ FDR declared 80 years ago. Why can’t today’s
⁷ Walsh, Politics of the Person, 240.
⁸ Edith Stein “examined empathy as a particular form of the act of knowing.” See Waltraud Herbstrieth,
measure of political reality. It unfurls for us the realization that it’s the person who’s the possibility of politics and not the reverse. The Aylan’s and Omran’s of this world call us back to the whole basis of our political origins, that is, that the polity is the abundant revelation of the extension over time and space of the truth that “we live by living beyond ourselves.” As Walsh explains the reason we “should reach out to strangers who may never reach out to us” is because the political community is only understandable “by virtue of the powerful priority of others for us.”9 Hidden beneath political reality is a ‘culture of giving’ that never gives ‘giving’ up, otherwise it decommissions its own reality.

Dietrich von Hildebrand outlined in The Heart how affectivity is a most misinterpreted dimension especially in philosophy and we can add in politics too.10 Instead of tending away from an objective relation to things, he believes, feeling feelings are actually necessary for a fully objective appreciation of the world we live in. He argues that one of the most important points in the elaboration of the role of the heart and of the sphere of tender affectivity is to expose the error of considering them as merely "subjective" or to build up a total disparity between "objectivity" and "affectivity." True objectivity essentially implies that an attitude conforms to the true nature and value of the object to which it refers. In other words, the feelings I have can equally measure up to the truth of the experience. But they can also fall short. An act of knowledge is objective when it grasps the true nature of the object. In this

---

9 Walsh, Politics of the Person, 240.
case, objectivity is equivalent to adequacy, validity, and truth. Again, von Hildebrand argues, that a judgment is objective when it is determined by the matter or theme in question and not by any prejudice. And an affective response is objective when it corresponds to the value of the fact and does not fall down the trapdoor of a purely Cartesian subjectivity." Aylan is not, of course, a mere object but his case is an objective fact which helps unfold what political science must measure up to if it's to be a science at all. I want to signal a positive note here, and that is, an experience or the expression of the methodological limitations of any particular science, and here we speak in regard to the political, is not self-limiting in itself, on the contrary, it’s revelatory of its very own possibility for extension. David Walsh describes with acuity human affectivity in terms of the politics of the person as follows:

feeling one another's pain is more than a matter of feeling. It is a veritable placing of ourselves in the other. We can have such feelings only because we are not bound up within our own feelings, but already feel beyond ourselves in ways that are at the root of what it means to be in communion with others.¹²

So, political sciences’ own limits are limited by the nature of its own reality and task, which is to unfold within space and time the truth and beauty of what it means to be a human person. As I've said, Aristotle stressed, “man is a political animal” and he also clearly recognized that politics is therefore not an exact science. It cannot be because of its subject matter. As he says, “it is a mark of the trained mind never to expect more precision in the treatment of any subject than the nature of that subject

¹² Walsh, Politics of the Person, 252.
permits.” Its inexactitude is precisely due to the human nature it seeks to reflect upon. To know the confines of a discipline is an achievement of science in itself and this is an important beginning for what Eric Voegelin called for in speaking of a ‘new science of politics.’ He appealed for a restoration of the theoretical dignity of political science not just by means of the “literary renaissance of philosophical achievements of the past” but through starting “from the concrete, historical situation of the age, taking into account the full amplitude of our empirical knowledge.” The fullness of experience includes all the dimensions of the drama of humanity that the human person ‘acts’ in and this is inclusive of the political and economic horizons. Jacques Maritain once made a critique of empiricism and empiricists saying that the problem was that they were not ‘empirical’ enough in their perspective. Voegelin correspondingly critiques the approach of a ‘positivistic science’ that subordinates theoretical relevance to method and thereby distorts the very meaning of science. If science is be understood as “a search for truth concerning the nature of the various realms of being” then whatever contributes to the success of this search is scientifically relevant. He says that “if on the contrary the use of a method is made the criterion of science then the meaning of science as a truthful

---

13 Politics, 1097b, 1094b.
account of the structure of reality ... is lost.”

Having the intellectual humility to admit the methodological limits of any approach is therefore not something negative but the beginning of knowing in the first place. It is on balance a good place to start. So, in terms of methodological limits we can see that there’s an inherent challenge in dealing with complex macro-political phenomena. Even at the level of national politics people are discovering that no party can be any longer be defined by its own ‘specifics.’ Parties are realizing that they are no longer contained within themselves. Circumstances are constantly changing so too the methods to take onboard these human realities must be amplified.

Actually, Voegelin's whole philosophical inquiry unfolds in the historical context of the great symbolic enterprise of reaffirming man's humanity under the horizon of the modern sciences and in resistance to the diverse forces of our age that deform human existence. I’d like to say that modern literature also deepens and clarifies the meditative movement operative in our age contributing to the restoration of the reality of the human person. Thomas Pfau, for instance, discerns in the modern novel the attempt to restore or recover the textured premodern forms of will and personhood that have in his estimation all but fallen into oblivion in modernity. They

17 Voegelin, The New Science of Politics. Robert Clark also strongly warned against reliance on a single method. He said: “A first rule should be to beware of one researcher, one method, or one instrument. The point is not to prove that the hypothesis is correct, but to find out something. To rely on a single approach is to be shackled.” See cited in Overcoming Methodological Challenges (Princeton University Press) [check reference etc.].
are, he says, attempts to mind or perhaps remind the modern.\(^{18}\) Indeed, Paul Ricoeur also made an important contribution to our understanding of the significance of the ‘narrative’ and sees it as an essential component of self-understanding.\(^{19}\) Therefore, my use of the experience of the young Syrian boy or of a writer like Flannery O’Connor (I mention a short story of hers in the next section) is not just telling stories about stories or pulling at heartstrings. We can say that I’m actually capable of constituting my own story because I already understand other stories. Other stories really give “me a sense of how people, actions, and consequences work.” With a tacit grasp of narrative I discover that “my experiences are prefigured in such a way” that they call out for interpretation. Ricoeur observes “to understand oneself is to understand oneself as one confronts the text and to receive from it the conditions for a self other than that which first undertakes the reading.”\(^{20}\) Ricoeur’s insight encapsulated in his motto le symbole donne à penser means essentially that life experiences and narratives are surfeit with existential meanings and can always give more than we can understand or even expect. The very possibility of politics likewise rests on a fertile terrain of the wealth of persons. It’s the task of theoreticians in differing disciplines to excavate the plentitude of ‘personalistic’ resources available in the unfolding of the drama of humanity in the political, social and economic arenas of


\(^{19}\) See Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin & David Pellauer, volume I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). This work is in three volumes.

human life.

Michael Polanyi equally emphasized the importance of a multidimensional approach when it comes to investigations in the human sciences. He observed that when we use language to speak, read and write, we actually

\[
\text{extend our bodily equipment and become intelligent beings... we interiorize these things and make ourselves dwell in them. Such extensions of ourselves develop new faculties in us; our whole education operates in this way; as each of us interiorizes our cultural heritage, he grows into a person seeing the world and experiencing life in terms of this outlook. Interiorization bestows meaning.}^21
\]

II Flannery O’Connor’s Displaced Person: towards an anamnetic recovery of personhood

Thus, Flannery O’Connor in a story ‘The Displaced Person’ offers, I believe, an extremely perceptive account of the ‘displacement’ the human person often encounters in our present world. In this case it’s based on an experience she had in her local community. O’Connor takes the story’s title from the Displaced Persons Act, which, between 1948 and 1952, permitted the immigration of some four hundred thousand European refugees into the United States. President Truman signed the bill with great reluctance because of its discriminatory policy toward Jews and Catholics. The Act stipulated that, in order to be eligible, one must have entered Germany, Italy, or Austria before December 22, 1945, which, according to Truman, ruled out 90 percent of the remaining Jewish people displaced by the war. Similarly excluded were the many Catholics who’d fled their largely Communist countries after the

---

December 22 deadline.

O’Connor actually based her story on the Matysiaks, a Polish family of four who arrived in rural Georgia in 1951, having been eligible for immigration under the Act. They settled in the tiny town of Gray, Georgia, and they met Regina O’Connor, Flannery’s mother, at Sacred Heart Church in Milledgeville, the only Catholic Church for miles. By the fall of 1953 they’d moved into a three-room shack at Andalusia, the O’Connor homestead. The Matysiaks were not a complete anomaly at the time. The priest of Sacred Heart, Father John Toomey, had worked through the Catholic Resettlement Commission, an international organization created by Pope Pius XII; to help other refugee families settle in the area. But O’Connor, who didn’t like to travel much because of her lupus, drew her inspiration from those who were closest to her—and so the Matysiaks, having settled almost literally in her backyard, captured her imagination.22

In O’Connor’s story Mrs. and Mr. Shortley manage a farm owned by a Mrs. McIntyre. Mr Shortley is the caretaker and general handyman. The Shortleys’ oversee Astor and Sulk, two black men who have been hired hands for some time. Mrs. Shortley treats them like wayward children—in her eyes, they should be handled in a way that’s consistent with “their limitations.” Polish refugees come to stay and work at the ranch; all arranged by Fr. Flynn the local priest. O’Connor describes the scene of how “then the front door opened and out stepped the man, the Displaced Person. He was short and a little sway-backed and wore gold-rimmed spectacles.” Mrs. Shortley’s

“vision narrowed on him and then widened to include the woman and two children in a group picture.” She is struck by something very peculiar, that is, “they looked like other people.” The only way Mrs. Shortley can try to pronounce their last name (Guizac) is to try and make out of it “Gobblehook.”

The initial meeting leads Mrs. Shortley to recall a newsreel she had once seen. In it she saw

a small room piled with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing. Before you could realize that it was real and take it into your head, the picture changed and a hallow voice was saying, ‘Time marches on!’

Mrs. Shortley has the sudden realization that the

Gogglehooks, like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place. If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say that they were not the kind that would also do it to others? The width and breadth of this question nearly shook her.

O’Connor never directly mentions Auschwitz by name but it’s obviously the horrific anthropological crucible Mrs. Shortly draws upon throughout the story as she ‘anamnetically’ recalls this cathartic human experience in history. The image of “the room piled high with bodies” recurs repeatedly in Flannery’s story. Mrs. Shortley reminds her husband that the foreigners are “from Poland where all them bodies

---

24 Ibid, 196.
25 Ibid., 198.
were stacked up at. You remember all them bodies?” Mrs. Shortley blames the priest because in her mind he seems to be trying to persuade Mrs. McIntyre “to bring another Polish family onto the place.” She believes that with two families there “there would be almost nothing spoken but Polish!” She sees in her imagination a war of words… the Polish words and the English words coming at each other, stalking forward, not sentences, just words, gabble gabble gabble, flung out high and shrill grappling at each other. She saw the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unreformed, flinging mud on the clean English words until everything was equally dirty. She saw them all piled up in a room all dead dirty words, theirs and hers too, piled up like naked bodies in the newsreel… She saw plainly that the meaning of the world was a mystery that had been planned and she was not surprised to suspect that she had a special part in the plan because she was strong.27

Mrs. Shortley’s repeated flashbacks to the images of the newsreel of the room piled high with bodies can be understood as an anamnetic experience through which she unbeknownst to herself seeks to recover a relationship with reality which in this instance concerns who the Displaced Person really is and how they ‘fit in,’ if at all. In her first remembrance we are told “before you could realize that it was real and take it into your head, the picture changed and a hallow voice was saying, ‘Time marches on!’”28 The ‘before’ suggests there’s already an ‘after’ in her mind concerning the truth of the whole reality of the Displaced Person. There’s the drama here of recapturing the distinction between what is ‘appearance’ and ‘reality.’

A certain equivalence exists between Mrs. Shortley’s whole experience and that of

---

26 Ibid., 201.
27 Ibid., 209.
28 Ibid., 196.
Plato’s prisoners in the cave.²⁹ Appearance is for Plato imprisonment as it is for Mrs. Shortley and others in O’Connor’s story. Mrs. Shortley is her own jailor because she does not see how it’s possible that “the whole lives for the part.”³⁰ She forewarns Astor and Sulk “all you colored people better look out” because “you know how much you can get for a mule.” Astor answers her, “nothing, no indeed…not one thing.” She explains, “before it was a tractor…it could be a mule. And before it was a Displaced Person, it could be a nigger.” She warns, “the time is going to come…when it won’t be no more occasion to speak of a nigger.”³¹ David Schindler talking about Plato’s Republic describes how “being trapped in this cave means being totally isolated, even for oneself, because one is caught up in the tyranny of the tiniest of vicious circles.” The cave is “nothing more or less than the absence of a certain generosity in one’s disposition towards reality and grace.” The way forward is the horizon of the political that essentially allows for “an expansion of desire beyond partiality to the whole.”³² Mrs. Shortley is unable or unwilling to apperceive the politics (even at the local level) of the person as the politics of being. As Walsh says, “one stands for all” and so an adequate science of politics must take into account as Voegelin argues “the full amplitude of our empirical knowledge.”³³ Thus, “if we are ready to displace all so that one may not be unjustly displaced, then we have made

²⁹ Plato, Republic, 514a, ff.
³⁰ See Walsh, Politics of the Person, 252.
³¹ ‘The Displaced Person,’ 206.
³³ The New Science of Politics,
our treatment of one the measure of our treatment of all.” In other words, it’s by means of the political that we can break the fetters of our own imprisonment to discover and protect the wealth of persons.

Frederick Lawerence explains that when Voegelin challenged political science to renew its theory in New Science of Politics, he meant quite concretely and seriously that only a person who has learned from Plato and Aristotle could realize what episteme in contrast to doxa means. A Voegelinian amnamnetic recovery reveals that “reality is not constituted by a completely self-transparent ego in the reflective mode of consciousness but remembered when formative experiences of an individual consciousness [like those recalled in the memories of Mrs. Shortley or the case of the Syrian refugee] are re-collected thus revealing the order (and disorder) of its discreet existence.” There’s a twofold aspect to anamnesis and that is firstly, when a memory is brought to mind and secondly, when a memory comes to mind. This dual characteristic plays an important part in Voegelin’s subsequent distinction between the two modes of the “meditative complex” that is consciousness. This twofold dimension of anamnesis is, I believe, evident as O’Connor’s story of the Displaced Person progresses.

There’s an important moment of periagoge for both Mrs. Shortley and Mrs.

---

34 Walsh, Politics of the Person, 254.
36 See Jerry Daly, Voegelin, Schelling and the Philosophy of Historical Existence (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 79.
McIntyre. The Displaced Person of the narrative and the repeated flashbacks bring to mind the reduction of the person to a mere species but then a memory of the whole eventually comes to mind for Mrs. Shortley and the ranch owner. Plato presents the expansion of horizons required as the soul’s conversio from “sheer phenomenality to the good.” In the Republic we discover that true knowledge and contact with reality (or in our case the truth of who the Displaced Person is or answering the wake-up call about how Aylan fits in) cannot be reached by trying to insert “vision into blind eyes.” There can be no conversion to “the light from the darkness except by turning the whole body.” For this we “must be turned around from the world of becoming together with the entire soul... until the soul is able to endure the contemplation and the brightest region of being.”

This is achieved in Flannery’s tale by an inner vision Mrs. Shortley has on a Sunday afternoon as she goes to drive the cows for Mr. Shortley who had a pain. The story is as follows:

she was walking slowly through the pasture, her arms folded, her eyes on the distant low-lying clouds that looked like rows of rows of white fish washed up on a great blue beach. She paused and after an incline to heave a sigh of exhaustion for she had immense weight to carry around... At times she could feel her heart, like a child's fist, clenching and unclenching inside her chest, and when the feeling came it stopped her thought altogether... she gained this incline without a tremor and stood at the top of

---

38 Theodore Adorno asserted that “in the concentration camps it was no longer an individual who died, but a specimen.” See Brian O’Connor, ed., The Adorno Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 86.
39 Schindler, Plato’s Critique of Impure Reason, 128.
40 Republic, 518b-d.
it, pleased with herself. Suddenly she watched, the sky folded back in two pieces like the curtain to a stage and a gigantic figure stood facing her. It was the color of the sun in the early afternoon, white-gold. It was of no definite shape but there were fiery wheels with fierce dark eyes in them, spinning rapidly around it. She was not able to tell if the figure was going forward or backward because its magnificence was so great. She shut her eyes in order to look at it and it turned blood-red and the white wheels turned white. A voice, very resonant, said the one word: ‘Prophesy!’

She stood there, tottering slightly but still upright, her eyes shut tight and her fists clenched and her straw sun hat low on her forehead. ‘The children of wicked nations will be butchered,’ she said in a loud voice. ‘Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?’

Mrs. Shortley opens her eyes and “woodenly plants one foot in front of the other” and makes her way back into the barn to where Mr. Shortley is. “She does not speak and remains in a daze. A short while afterwards she overhears Mrs. McIntyre (the ranch owner) telling the old priest that she’s going “to give Mr. Shortley his month’s notice tomorrow.” The Polish family (the Guizacs) are so efficient around the farm that the Shortley’s were now surplus to requirements. Mrs. Shortley reacts immediately her face is “an almost volcanic red” and tells her husband “you ain’t going to be fired” and packs all their belongings along with their two girls into their car. We are told, “a dark yellow sun was beginning to rise in a sky that was the same dark gray as the highway. The fields stretched away, stiff and weedy, on each side. ‘Where we goin?, Mr Shortley asked for the first time. It’s not until the Shortley’s are on their journey in the car and away from the farmstead that the significance of the

42 ‘The Displaced Person,’ 211-213
'inner vision' unfolds; as an insight and a possible answer emerges to the question whose “breadth and width” had originally unnerved Mrs. Shortley.\footnote{Ibid., 196.}

The two young Shortley daughters are totally unaware of what happened to their mother. So, they begin asking her “Where we goin, Ma? Where we goin?” They keep repeating the same question as they travel along. But then the narrator provides us with the real \textit{denouement} of the vision. Like the prisoners in Plato’s cave, Mrs Shortley has to turn away and around in order to acquire a new vision in the context of her blindness as to the identity of the Displaced Person. Plato describes the reaction of the prisoners who experience release from their fetters. They “being nearer reality and turned toward more real things” see more truly. But finally the prisoner is “able to look upon the sun itself and see its true nature, not by reflections in water or phantasms of it in an alien setting, but in and by itself in its own place.”\footnote{\textit{Republic}, 515b-516b.}

The young Shortley’s think their mum is playing a joke on them and “that their father, staring straight ahead…was imitating a dead man.” They did not know, in fact, that their mother “had had a great experience or \textbf{ever been displaced in the world from all that belonged to her}.” O’Connor describes how “their mother, her huge body rolled back still against the seat and her eyes like blue-painted glass, seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country.”\footnote{‘The Displaced Person,’ 214.}

There’s the realization that Mrs. Shortley is really the ‘person’ displaced because she did not recognize the ‘whole’ and did not understand the ‘part’ as ‘part’ of the
'whole.' The resonant voice in the vision hauntingly cries out, "‘the children of wicked nations will be butchered... legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?'"47

I’ve mentioned already how Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre have an important periangoge in the narrative. There’s no time to sufficiently develop this in the case of Mrs. McIntyre. But her conversio is intimately related to that of the Shortley’s and the question of the Displaced person. Mrs. McIntyre feels no moral responsibility for the limitations of the world around her. She says, “I am not responsible for the world’s misery.”48 Ivan Karamazov poses a comparable challenge in Dostoevsky’s novel and has a whole discussion with his brother Alyosha on the nature of evil and responsibility for it. He declares, “It isn’t God I don’t accept...it’s the world created by Him, the world of God I don’t accept, and cannot agree to accept.” In regard to the sufferings of children Ivan believes it “quite impossible to understand why they should have to suffer.”49

Mrs. McIntyre eventually decides that “all her life she had been fighting the world’s overflow and now she had it in the form of a Pole.” But of him she says, “you’re just like the rest of them.” The old priest visits again and speaks about “Purgatory as Mrs. McIntyre squinted furiously at him from an opposite chair.” She tells the priest “Mr. Guizac is not satisfactory...he’s extra...he doesn’t fit in.” The old pastor looks

46 Aristotle writes, if an individual is not fully self-sufficient after separation, he will stand in the same relationship to the whole as the parts.” See Politics, 1253a18.
48 Ibid., 223.
49 The Brothers Karamazov, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin, 2003), 308, 319. The elder Zosima says that true love is “to make oneself responsible for all human beings and for the entire world.”
her in the face to plead but “he has nowhere to go.” Mrs. McIntyre reiterates that she did not create the situation. In the midst of this a peacock\textsuperscript{50} appears raises its tail and spreads it “with a shimmering timbrous noise.” The priest stands transfixed and declares, “Christ will come like that!” Mrs. McIntyre reddens and sets a “puritanical expression” since Christ in the conversation embarrasses her “the way sex had her mother.” Again she protests, “it’s not my responsibility that Mr. Guizac has nowhere to go...I don’t feel myself responsible for all the extra people in the world.” The old minister is still transfixed by the peacock’s tail and murmurs “the Transfiguration.”

The cock lowers its tail and begins to pick grass. Mrs. McIntyre emphasizing each word says, “he didn’t have to come here in the first place.” The old priest smiles and says, “He came to redeem us.”\textsuperscript{51} In the meantime Mr. Shortley returns to tell all that Mrs. Shortley died of a stroke and that the “Pole killed her.” Mr. Shortley goes on to explain how “he never had cared for foreigners” and that “none of them were like us.”

Mrs. McIntyre wants to tell the priest “her moral obligation was to her own people, to Mr. Shortley, who had fought in the world war for his country and not to Mr. Guizac who had merely arrived here to take advantage of whatever he could.” Seeing that the “Displaced Person had not been fired,” Fr. Flynn calls again to “take up giving Mrs. McIntyre instructions where he remembered leaving off.” He tells her “when God sent his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord...as a Redeemer to mankind, He...” At this Mrs. McIntyre interrupts and says, “I want to talk to you

\textsuperscript{50} The early Christians used the symbol of the peacock as a sign of immortality and resurrection.

\textsuperscript{51} ‘The Displaced Person,’ 224-226.
about something serious!” Glaring at the old man fiercely she declares, “as far as I’m concerned... **Christ was just another D.P.**” Mrs. McIntyre still intends to sack the Pole but she keeps putting it off. But at night she has dreams about the Displaced Person. In one dream the priest comes to call and drones on at her saying, “dear lady, I know your tender heart won’t suffer you to turn the porrrr man out. Think of the thousands of them, think of the ovens and the boxcars and the camps and the sick children and Christ Our Lord.” In her dream she replies, “he’s extra and he’s upset the balance around here... and I’m a practical woman and there are no ovens here and no camps and no Christ Our Lord and when he leaves he’ll make more money.””

The priest drones on “the ovens and the boxcars and the sick children... and our dear Lord.” Mrs. McIntyre retorts, “**just one too many.**” In the meantime Mr. Shortley continues to rage on against the Displaced Person to Mrs. McIntyre and to anyone who’ll listen: “all men was created free and equal... and I risked my life and limb to prove it. Gone over there and fought and bled and died and come back on over here and find out he’s got my job—just exactly who I been fighting.”

The story of the Displaced Person and the experience of the Syrian boy can, I argue, be understood in terms of an attempt at an anamnetic recovery of the “width and breath” of the truth and beauty of the human person. As we noted Voegelin claimed there’s a need for an enlargement of the field of investigation which correspondingly compels a theoretical reawakening. As I’ve mentioned Mrs. McIntyre says to Fr. Flynn, “I want to talk to you about something serious...as far as I’m

---

52 ‘The Displaced Person,’ 227-232.
concerned... **Christ was just another D.P.**” In saying this we can perhaps recognize that she actually catches a momentary glimpse of the ‘face’ of the ‘whole’ in the ‘particular’ (Displaced Person), as if in the eye of the passerby. It’s an insight Mrs. Shortley only got an inkling of in her own particular ‘vision.’ But Mrs. McIntyre has to look ‘beyond’ in order to try and fully apprehend the identity of the Displaced Person. Persons are, as David Walsh says, “self-transcendence.” To fully fathom this reality Mrs. McIntyre opens up however inadvertently to the horizon of understanding ‘particularity’ in view of the ‘Other’ that’s beyond the ‘other.’ This is because of who we are as persons. Indeed, this is the challenge of political communities at all levels, that is, “to learn how to take this into account.” Actually, Václav Havel, former Czech president, playwright, philosopher and agnostic noted how there is to be found within humanity itself a “restlessness of transcendence.” He wrote about how during the time of the Communist ideology there was the attempt to stamp out all belief but how, in fact, “life [actually] rebels against all uniformity and leveling; its aim is not sameness, but variety, the restlessness of transcendence.” In other words, human life and that which is ‘beyond’ cannot be boxed in or trampled on by others. It’s just how we are as human persons. A belief in that which is ‘beyond’ is part of who we are as human persons. It’s constitutive of our very ‘being.’ It is, as Walsh attests, the politics of being.

Henri de Lubac in an essay ‘Concerning “The Sacred”’ observed that the word

---

53 Politics of the Person, 243.
54 Ibid.
hierophany meaning to show or to manifest “applies to the places, objects, persons and all other realities through which the sacred manifests itself to man, or in the presence of which man experiences the sacred.” He notices that it’s “certain that everything that man has handled, felt, met or loved could become a hierophany.” But today what’s happened in our world is that “this sense has been displaced onto events, objects and to persons to which our present-day world has given quasi-sacred value.” Thus, he sees that it’s not that the sacred has suddenly disappeared rather “by being displaced it has in some sort camouflaged itself” in unexpected ways. Indeed, de Lubac uses the instance of how Claude Lévi-Strauss, “an atheist and materialist sociologist” explains how “politics” is “an excellent example” of this camouflaging in the human sciences.56 Likewise, there’s a type of what I call an ‘anthropological anorexia’ when it comes to reflections on political reality. The human person who’s the wealth at the center of the very possibility of politics often lies totally hidden.

The Displaced Person of O’Connor’s story in their geographical and cultural ‘displacement’ is not automatically evacuated of all meaning as a ‘person’ and neither is the little boy Aylan Kurdi or Omran Daqneesh. Mrs. McIntrye mentions Christ and although not necessarily a believer (although Fr. Flynn thinks he’s instructing her) she significantly identifies and cognizes Him as another Displaced Person. He is, in fact, the Displaced One. De Lubac beautifully describes the Displaced One as follows:

It is only in becoming the Poor Man par excellence, the Persecuted Man par

excellence, the Hungering, Weeping Man par excellence—and this means: the Godforsaken Man—that he can promise superabundant good to the have-nots... Because Jesus Christ meets us in our neighbor, and because God meets us in Jesus Christ, our relation to our neighbor takes on an unprecedented significance. “What you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done to me,” because I stand with my whole being behind the least, whose burden of poverty, hunger, tears, and oppression I have superabundantly taken upon myself.57

As de Lubac suggests regarding the ‘sacred,’ so too the truth and beauty of the human person has all but “disguised itself” in the realms of economic and political reality. Therefore, it’s imperative that the “whole lives for the part”58 and that we don’t camouflage this especially in the human sciences. The wealth of persons is the horizon of politics and the challenge of any science of politics is to account for the height, breath and depth of this reality.59 I want to conclude with an extraordinary piece from David Walsh’s new book Politics of the Person as Politics of Being. This is to me saying the ‘unsaid’ which needs ‘saying’ and may perhaps be a response to Abdullah Kurdi’s call that ‘my kids have to be the wake-up call for the whole world.”

David Walsh explains how

the child is all to the parents; each member is all to the political community. For each of us there are of course other others and politics is the arena in which it is just what is owed to third persons that is of decisive significance. It is an order of justice, not of love, or at least not primarily of love. The family is crucially the latter. But even the mandate of justice must converge with the mandate of love when it acknowledges

58 Walsh, Politics of the Person, 252.
59 St Paul prays for the Ephesians that they “may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.” See Ephesians 3:18-19.
the inexhaustibility of the individual person. The other who must be accorded his or her rights must be treated as if all the rights of existence were lodged in this particular instant. To be rights they must be unconditional, as love is. In this sense the rights of one are not really solitary, for they implicate the rights of all... Rights that are merely conditional are not rights at all. They can scarcely be rendered coherent if we fail to see that in their invocation, at the point at which a human being is most exposed, this particular other has become all to us. It is in need that the part becomes the whole.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{60} Politics of the Person, 252.