



THE CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL IMPERATIVE: A RESPONSE THROUGH TRANSCENDENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Posted on January 1, 2026 by Santiago Mondejar Flores



Contemporary philosophy—shaped by debates over consciousness, artificial intelligence, transhumanism, and ecological collapse—faces a profound anthropological crisis. The human being has been successively reduced to biology, psychology, or technology, stripped of metaphysical depth and transcendental meaning. Against this reductionism, a renewed philosophical anthropology must affirm the irreducibility of the person, defend freedom without dissolving it into autonomy, and restore teleology without lapsing into dogmatism.

This task, both moral and metaphysical, was already outlined by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. The crisis of practical reason, MacIntyre argued, does not arise merely from a deficit of arguments, but from the disintegration of the institutions and narratives that once ordered human desire toward the good. Modernity, in replacing shared ends with subjective preference, has produced what he famously called the “emotivist culture”—a world where moral judgments express feelings rather than rational evaluations ([MacIntyre 2007](#)).

MacIntyre's remedy was a return to Aristotelian teleology: the recovery of virtue ethics within communities capable of sustaining the practices and narratives that make moral growth possible. Yet this moral reconstruction, while necessary, presupposes a deeper question: What is the human being? What metaphysical structure allows for moral teleology and historical self-transcendence?

Here the work of the Spanish philosopher Leonardo Polo (1926–2013) becomes noteworthy. Rooted in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition yet profoundly original, Polo offers a metaphysical anthropology that complements and deepens MacIntyre's ethical vision. His philosophy, centered on the agent intellect, the human Logos, and the methodological breakthrough he called the abandonment of the mental limit, provides the ontological foundations for a renewed understanding of the person as freedom, knowledge, and love in act.

This project finds a powerful theological validation in the work of Matthew Levering. In *Scripture and Metaphysics*, Levering argues that the modern opposition between biblical narrative and metaphysical analysis has impoverished both, leading to a God—and by extension, a humanity—stripped of transcendent depth.

His retrieval of Aquinas's vision of theology as *sacra doctrina*—a contemplative wisdom that unites scriptural narrative with metaphysical inquiry—offers a model for the very integration our anthropology

requires. For Levering, the intellectual task is inherently transformative, a “metaphysical ascesis” that purifies the mind from idolatry and forms a particular kind of knower ([Levering 2004](#)). This rhymes neatly with Polo's approach, suggesting that the recovery of the person is not merely conceptual but ascetical.

For Aristotle, the agent intellect was the faculty that illuminates sensible forms, enabling universal knowledge. Thomas Aquinas deepened this insight, identifying in the intellect a participation in divine light—a created echo of the divine act of knowing. Modern philosophy, however, longs to reduce the intellect to a psychological function or to computational processes, severing it from its metaphysical root.

Here analytic Thomists such as Edward Feser provide crucial reinforcement. In [Immortal Souls](#), Feser argues that no empirical or computational account can capture the intrinsic semantic content, universal scope, or demonstrative reasoning that characterize intellectual understanding. Computational systems manipulate symbols syntactically, but understanding is irreducibly semantic; it involves the apprehension of forms in a manner incompatible with reduction to neural patterns or algorithms ([Feser 2024](#), chaps. 7–9).

These considerations support the claim that the intellect possesses properties that cannot be exhaustively naturalized, thereby grounding Polo's thesis that the agent intellect is the nucleus of the personal act of being—*intellectus ut co-actus*—an openness to truth in act and a participation in reality's unfolding.

This vision restores depth to human comprehension. To know is not to dominate an object but to grow in the light of being. Knowledge, for Polo, is an event of personal expansion—a teleological ascent that unites theory and life. In this way, his metaphysics harmonizes with MacIntyre's moral teleology: both see human flourishing as the ordered realization of potentialities toward the good, whether in thought or in action.

Levering's emphasis on contemplation as the primary end of intellectual activity further secures this point, elevating knowledge from a pragmatic instrument to a union with the real, wherein “practical ends are truly achieved” only within this contemplative horizon (Levering 2004, p. 3).

Polo's second great theme is the human Logos. Throughout philosophy, from Heraclitus to Hegel, the Logos has signified the rational order of the cosmos. Polo extends this meaning to anthropology. The Logos is the principle by which the human person unifies the multiplicity of the world, articulating reality through reason, language, and culture.

In this sense, the Logos is not merely discursive; it is creative and relational. Through it, human beings integrate knowledge, communicate truth, and form communities—those very mediating institutions that MacIntyre deems essential for virtue. The Logos thus grounds both epistemology and ethics, uniting personal interiority with the social and cosmic order.

Polo emphasizes that the Logos always points beyond itself ([Esclanda & Sellés 2014](#)). It finds its origin and measure in the divine Word, through whom all things were made. When the Logos forgets its transcendent source, reason collapses into either formalism or skepticism—the twin poles of modernity. Levering's exegesis of the "I AM" of Exodus affirms that the God of covenant is none other than the God of pure act, whose metaphysical simplicity grounds his personal fidelity (Levering 2004, p. 61).

A Logos closed off from this source is a Logos adrift; one open to it becomes the principle of wisdom.

The distinctive hallmark of Polo's thought is his method of the abandonment of the mental limit. Modern philosophy, he observes, confines knowledge within the relation between subject and object. From Kant to Heidegger, consciousness remains imprisoned within its own horizon; reality becomes what appears to or is constituted by thought.

Polo names this closure the mental limit: the coincidence of thought with its object that secures conceptual clarity but blocks access to being as such. To abandon the mental limit is not to reject objectivity, but to transcend its confinement—to allow the intellect to pass beyond its self-enclosure toward the real.

This abandonment opens what Polo calls the "moreover" (*además*): the horizon of wisdom, where knowing becomes contemplative openness rather than possessive grasp. It is the space in which the person encounters reality not as object but as gift. This is precisely the kind of "metaphysical ascesis" Levering identifies in the theological tradition—the limp of Jacob, the awe of Moses, required to encounter a radically strange and salvific God (Levering 2004, p. 3). It is a spiritual exercise for the

intellectual life.

In this movement, Polo identifies four personal transcendentals that structure human existence: co-existence, an openness to others and to God that grounds relational being; freedom, both native and filial, realized not in self-assertion but in self-gift; knowing, understood as an act of participation in truth ordered to the divine theme; and loving, the summit of personal life in which all the others find their fulfillment.

Feser provides metaphysical reinforcement here as well. Drawing on Aristotelian-Thomistic anthropology, he describes the soul as an incorporeal incomplete substance: the substantial form of the body whose rational powers—intellect and will—are immaterial, and therefore capable of surviving bodily death, yet ordered by nature to embodiment (Feser 2024, chaps. 10–11).

This model accounts for both the unity of the human person and the inherent teleology of rational action. It also dovetails with Polo's insistence that the personal act of being is dynamically open—co-existent, free, knowing, and loving—properties that presuppose an intimate unity of soul and body while transcending merely biological explanation.

These transcendentals are not static properties but dynamic movements, convertible into one another in the measure that the person grows in truth and love. They correspond, at a higher metaphysical level, to MacIntyre's vision of moral growth through virtue: both describe the progressive unification of the human person in relation to the good.

In the theological sphere, Polo's thought also engages and corrects Karl Rahner's transcendental anthropology. Rahner's praised *Vorgriff auf esse*—the pre-apprehension of being—interprets human openness to God as an unconscious, formal condition of cognition. Yet this move, for all its brilliance, tends to absorb transcendence into immanence, rendering grace a natural extension of human dynamism and reducing divine filiation to an anonymous structure of spirit ([Rahner 1982](#)).

Feser's critique of emergentist accounts of consciousness strengthens Polo's response to Rahner. Emergentist models claim that consciousness or rationality “arise” from material complexity, yet fail to explain how inherently immaterial operations—universal concepts, normativity, intentionality—could be generated from purely physical processes (Feser 2024, chap. 8). Emergence provides no adequate

metaphysical bridge between matter and intellect, and thus cannot ground the filial openness to God that Polo identifies as a real act of being rather than as a merely formal precondition. This reinforces Polo's rejection of immanentism and his insistence that grace heals a historical wound rather than completing an automatic metaphysical dynamism.

Taken together, Polo's concepts of the agent intellect, the Logos, and the abandonment of the mental limit articulate a metaphysics of the person that answers the cultural and intellectual crises of our time. His anthropology shows that human dignity is not founded on autonomy or consciousness, but on the act of being—a dynamic participation in the divine esse.

In this sense, Polo completes MacIntyre's project from below, so to speak: he provides the ontological depth that MacIntyre's virtue ethics presupposes. The renewal of moral life and institutions must rest upon a renewed understanding of the person as co-existent, free, knowing, and loving. Levering's model of *sacra doctrina* shows this integration in action, where narrative and metaphysical reason, in the hands of contemplatives from Moses to Aquinas, are united in the single enterprise of wisdom.

Against the atomizing tendencies of modern culture, Polo restores the unity of intellect and will, theory and praxis, nature and grace. Against technological transhumanism, he insists that the human being cannot be engineered or surpassed, for the person is not a function but an act—a being whose growth is measured not by power but by participation in truth and love.

Here again Feser's arguments sharpen the point. Drawing on Searle's "Chinese Room" critique and Gödelian limitations of formal systems, he shows that computational performance cannot amount to understanding, that no symbol-manipulating machine can possess the intentionality, semantic grasp, or self-reflective rationality constitutive of a person (Feser 2024, pp. 203–224).

These arguments undercut transhumanist claims that artificial systems could replicate or replace human intellect, thereby reinforcing Polo's insistence on the irreducible transcendence of personal being.

Polo's invitation to abandon the mental limit is therefore more than a philosophical method. It is a call to conversion: a summons to recover the contemplative dimension of reason, to rediscover knowledge as adoration, and to see freedom as self-gift. It is an appeal to philosophers and believers alike to inhabit

the “moreover”—that space of openness where finite being meets the Infinite.

The convergence between MacIntyre, Polo, Levering, and Feser is more than incidental. All diagnose the fragmentation of modern reason and propose recovery through a restoration of metaphysical depth, teleology, and contemplation. Together they sketch the outlines of a renewed Christian humanism—one that integrates virtue and wisdom, narrative and metaphysics, history and eternity.

In a world tempted to measure people by functions and intelligence by algorithms, this integrated tradition reminds us that human beings are not assemblages of processes but acts of being—creatures whose destiny unfolds in truth, whose flourishing is ordered to the good, and whose consummation is found only in love.

Thus, in the harmony of Polo's transcendental anthropology, MacIntyre's virtue-ethics, Levering's contemplative theology, and Feser's analytic defense of the soul, we glimpse a single, unified vision: that to recover the human person is to restore the primacy of being, truth, and love in the drama of contemporary thought.
