

The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas

ESSAYS IN
THOMISTIC PHILOSOPHY,
NEW AND OLD

W. Norris Clarke, S.J.

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SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

W. NORRIS CLARKE, SJ

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SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

*Essays in Thomistic Philosophy,
New and Old*

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P R E F A C E

At the age of ninety-three, as I draw near the conclusion of my long career of teaching and writing philosophy, many of my colleagues have urged me to select and publish in one place what I consider the most significant articles among the seventy or so I have written already—not all published. This is the result. I have chosen twelve articles already published and four new ones, covering a fairly wide spectrum of topics. Although they do not all treat directly with Saint Thomas himself, they are all what I would describe as “Thomistically inspired.” I hope they may further significantly broaden the spectrum of writings available to the Thomistic community and others.

Publisher’s Acknowledgment

The Publisher thanks Susan Munroe, OCV, for her invaluable editorial assistance in bringing the late Father Clarke’s book to publication.

THE CREATIVE RETRIEVAL OF
SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

PART I

Reprinted Articles

Twenty-Fourth Award of the Aquinas Medal,
by the American Catholic Philosophical
Association, to W. Norris Clarke, SJ

Introduction by Mary T. Clark, RSCJ

We are conferring the Aquinas Medal tonight on one of our own members, a most faithful participant in our annual meetings and regional meetings. We all have our different memories of Norris Clarke, but there is a common ACPA memory which we all share: that of Father Clarke rising up after a paper has been delivered to compliment the author, graciously referring to the fine aspects of the paper, but then gently and critically probe the assumptions and the conclusions reached. Always a philosopher!

Father Clarke's students have their own individual recollections, but they all remember him as the "personal" professor who really gets to know each student, as a teacher who can clarify the most mystifying of doctrines, and, above all, as a philosopher who never loses his "sense of wonder."

But Father Clarke's influence has extended far beyond his university and beyond this association. He is one of the best-known philosophers on the American scene.

In awarding the Aquinas Medal to Father Norris Clarke, SJ, the American Catholic Philosophical Association is honoring someone who has been an outstanding philosopher in the Catholic tradition for more than thirty years. Father Clarke served as president of the Jesuit Philosophical Association in 1960, as president of the Metaphysical Society of America in 1968,

First published in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 54 (1980): 14-25.

as president of the American Catholic Philosophical Association in 1969, and he is an active and esteemed member of the American Philosophical Association. As the American editor in chief and cofounder of the *International Philosophical Quarterly* (IPQ), a widely respected journal, Father Clarke has enabled philosophers all over the world to develop their positions and win a critical hearing from colleagues and to carry on the philosophical dialogue between East and West, between the ancients and the moderns.

Father Clarke was educated at Georgetown University and at the Jesuit House of Studies in Jersey, England; after receiving his licentiate in theology at Woodstock College and his PhD in philosophy at the Université Catholique de Louvain, he taught briefly at Woodstock and Bellarmine Colleges. In 1955 Fordham University called him, and there he has taught philosophy to appreciative students for twenty-five years, giving them not only the exhilarating experience of enjoying metaphysics but giving them as well that profound sense of the sacredness and mystery of being which he himself possesses.

Despite his teaching and editing responsibilities, Father Clarke has published forty-six articles in books and journals. Some of these have dealt directly with Thomism, and all have been Thomist-inspired. Some of his widely influential articles are "What is Really Real?" "The Limitation of Act by Potency," and "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas."

But it is above all in his recently published book—*The Philosophical Approach to God: A Neo-Thomist Perspective*—that we find Father Clarke bringing to light the most important Thomistic texts and revealing the vitality of Thomism for philosophy today. In this book he approaches Thomism in much the same way as Thomas Aquinas approached Aristotle, critically and creatively. He understands by Neo-Thomist "that loosely but recognizably united group of thinkers who acknowledge that the basic inspiration and structure of their thought derives from St. Thomas Aquinas although each one may have made various creative adaptations of his own, in both method and content, inspired by various movements of thought since the time of St. Thomas."¹ According to Father Clarke, Thomism has a "remarkable survival power, and every so often, just when it seems that it is about to fade out, it has a way of renewing itself, like the phoenix, usually by a double movement of deeper return to its own sources plus the creative assimilation of some new insight or method of later thought."² Because Father Clarke is sensitive to the essential in Thomistic metaphysics, he is able to free it from its historical moorings for further development.

In his masterly article in *IPQ* (December 1974), “What Is Most and Least Relevant in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Today,” Father Clarke cites eight Thomistic themes capable of nourishing philosophical thought. Here he has drawn up a Magna Carta for the future development of a Thomist-inspired philosophy and has called for a new kind of Thomist, critical and creative. Thomism can be a “powerful and much needed leaven to be used in creative confrontation with modern thought and its problems, by independently responsible Thomistically inspired philosophers.”³

Because you, Father Clarke, are such a philosopher and because your teaching and your writing for more than a quarter of a century have helped to make many Thomistically inspired philosophers, the American Catholic Philosophical Association is happy to present to you tonight the Aquinas Medal!

Medalist's Address: The Philosophical Importance of Doing One's Autobiography

BY W. NORRIS CLARKE, SJ

I should first like to express how touched and honored I am to receive this honor from this association. I am not at all sure whether I really belong in the long list of distinguished thinkers who have received it before me, but that is your problem, not mine. I would like to say that my thirty years of belonging to this association and of attending all but a handful of its annual conventions have been one of the most pleasant and fruitful aspects of my professional life as a philosopher. Together with the meetings of the Metaphysical Society of America these are the ones I have most enjoyed and looked forward to each year, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many friends I have found in it down the years for helping to make it the fruitful existential matrix for doing philosophy in the Christian tradition that it has always been for me.

The theme I have chosen to share with you tonight is neither heavy, nor erudite, nor recondite—as befits an after-dinner address. Yet I consider it to be a truly serious philosophical theme, despite its rather odd title: “The Philosophical Importance of Doing One's Autobiography.”

My attention was first drawn to this idea back in 1974, when, as editor of the *International Philosophical Quarterly*, I accepted for publication a very

brief article by a young author, John Claude Curtin, entitled “Autobiography and the Dialectic of Consciousness” (*IPQ* 14:3 [1974]), and I have reflected on it off and on since that time with deepening insight, so that my thoughts and his have now merged. Why is it important to do one’s own autobiography? The answer lies in what it means to be a *person* in the peculiarly *human* mode. To *be* is to be one, as Saint Thomas and indeed all great metaphysicians tell us. And to be a *person*, he tells us again in what I consider one of the simplest and deepest of all definitions of the person, is to take conscious self-possession of one’s own being, to be master of oneself (*dominus sui*). But our incarnate *human* mode of being a person necessarily involves living in a body whose life unfolds successively across time, whose life is therefore inevitably dispersed across time. Time is the mode of a being that is not totally present to its whole self. Hence we have a problem in fully being ourselves, in taking full self-conscious possession of our own being, which is so essential to a history, a story. If we let our own past slip away behind us, drift away downstream unretrieved, save for occasional vivid episodes that stand out like isolated islands above the flow, then we have lost hold of a part, an ever-growing part, of our very selves. If we wish to know in full self-consciousness *who we are*, we must assimilate and integrate—self-consciously and deliberately, I think—at least the key moments and phases of our own past, so that the meaningful pattern hidden within them emerges into our self-consciousness, so that our lives reveal themselves as a meaningful *story*, and not just a collection of unconnected slides about our past, stored up in more or less accurate memory. In order to thus take possession of our past and integrate it meaningfully into our present, it is not necessary—and it would obviously take too long—to assume all the multitudinous external events of our past. It is enough to pick out the key moments of our inner development, the key phases of our interior autobiography, and draw together the pattern woven into them. For, unlikely as it may seem to some, there always is some pattern to be discerned, even if so many of the moments seem to be negative, shadow-filled, making a step backwards rather than forwards. It is not necessary to write down this autobiography, though it certainly helps. It is enough to reenact it within one’s own inner consciousness—it can even be done quite briefly and still quite fruitfully, but it must be done consciously and reflectively, looking always for the pattern, the connected weave, of the story.

One interesting thing that happens when one thus takes possession of one’s past, integrating it into a whole with one’s present, is that a surprising amount of psychic “energy” is released. This startled me a bit when I

did it recently in preparation for this talk. But when I checked with a colleague and old friend of mine, Dr. Ewert Cousins of the theology department at Fordham, a well travelled master in the realms of psychology and spirituality, he at once answered, “Why, of course, your past is always a latent source of psychic and spiritual energy, and whenever you retrieve the important moments into consciousness they release a large amount of energy.” This is the value, by the way, for individuals and societies, of commemorating the important events of their past in celebrations: new creative energy is thereby released each time. “Do this in memory of Me . . . ,” as Jesus asks of us in every Eucharistic prayer.

If the doing of one’s autobiography in some deliberate form is important for one’s personal life as a whole, so too is it important for philosophers, as philosophers, to take conscious self-possession of the key moments in their own philosophical autobiography, their own inner development as philosophers, in a word, to try to come to know *who they are* existentially as philosophers. In what follows, I would like to sketch out for you a few of the main moments in my own philosophical autobiography, not that mine has any special deep significance for everybody, but only in order to stimulate you to do *your own* philosophical autobiography, to evoke from you the key moments of your own philosophical development that match in some analogous way those which I will propose. So as I unfold some of the key moments in my story I invite each one of you to use it as a springboard at each step to evoke your own story. That experience, and not any significance of my story in itself, is the main point and contribution of this whole address.

First Coming to Self-Consciousness

This is an important moment, and the modes of coming to it are amazingly diverse for different people. I have been able to pinpoint mine fairly accurately at around three years of age, and the memory of it sixty-three years later is almost as vivid as it was then. As a boy I used to play out in the West Side Park in New York City along the Hudson River, where the West Side Highway is now. There was a large rock formation in this park that was ideal for kids to climb on. In the middle was a deep cleft in the rock several feet wide. It was a perennial challenge to leap over this—to a child—impressive abyss, and apparently I had not yet gotten up sufficient courage (or perhaps strength in my legs) to pull it off. Then one day I

must have gathered up my determination and I made a soaring leap successfully to the other side. As I landed I suddenly burst into self-consciousness with “*I did it, I did it.*” It was *my* achievement, and I savored it to the full. *I* was the one who had leapt over the chasm on my own.

This coming to self-consciousness was through a positive physical achievement. Others have told me they have come to theirs through a negative experience. Thus one woman recently told me that when she was around two or three she picked up a live baby turtle. Not realizing what she was doing she kept squeezing it till it suddenly went limp, and her friends around her cried out, “You’ve killed it, you’ve killed it!” She suddenly emerged into self-consciousness with the feeling of shock, perhaps even something like guilt, “I am the one who killed a turtle.” What was your first moment? And what is the significance of the content and modality of this first moment for one’s later development? I leave this to you to reflect on.

The Role of High Places

I consider this phase to be of quite profound significance in my life, even to this day. And apparently the same thing is true of many philosophers, especially metaphysicians. Some German philosopher, whose name I have long forgotten, many years ago drew up an impressive list of the correlation between some experience of high places, mountains, etc., and the lives of great metaphysicians. For example, Saint Thomas was taken at the age of six to live at the great Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, perched, as many of you know, on the edge of a mountain with a vast perspective over the surrounding countryside. For myself, I remember with the utmost clarity how I used to love to climb the highest trees I could find, perch myself securely in the crotch of a branch, and look out over the surrounding territory, with a wonderful feeling of expansion of consciousness.

More exciting was when, at about fourteen or fifteen, I would climb up the great towers of the George Washington Bridge from the river shore to the roadway, some three hundred feet above. It was not really that difficult or dangerous if one had rubber-soled shoes and cool nerves. I had a sufficient supply of both, and the expansion of consciousness was tremendous. Even better was to climb up the sheer five-hundred-foot-high cliffs of the Palisades on the other side of the river, finding a niche

two-thirds of the way up, and sitting there quiet and all alone—I did my serious climbing alone—contemplating the vast panorama of the river, and feeling somehow, intuitively and inarticulately, the vast hidden forces of nature supporting me and making the whole world pulse with life, and then hidden behind these and woven somehow through everything some still vaster mysterious unifying Presence, which I thought dimly must be something like God.

This particular climb, as I realized later and perhaps even then, was really quite a dangerous one, requiring considerable skill and a large supply of cool nerves. When I first tried it, at a place I discovered to be the best, just above a large sign, “No Climbing Here,” I had made it two-thirds of the way up and then got stuck, and could move neither up nor down. Looking down, I saw the traffic all stopped on the river road below, motorists shouting and gesticulating at me to come down, then a contingent of police yelling they were going to arrest me. I shouted back, “Come and get me. I would love to get arrested, anything to get out of here.” But I knew they would be afraid to climb up after me. Then they said they would get a rope and pull me up from above, and departed. I realized that if they did rescue me I would promptly end up in the local cooler, a disgrace to my family, etc. On studying my situation more carefully I discovered there was a bulge of rock to my right and I could see only that there was a niche for my foot beyond it. If there was one for my hand higher up, which I could not see, I could swing around and from there on it was easier going and I could get away. A decision had to be made at once. With a prayer and a hope, literally not knowing whether death or life awaited me, I gathered up my courage and swung around the rock into space. Luckily, as you can see, there was a handhold. I caught on, quickly snaked up the rest of the cliff and fled into the bushes to watch just as the cops arrived with ropes to pull me up and arrest me. But something momentous happened to me as I swung out into space, suspended between being and nonbeing. At that moment I suddenly broke through to the felt awareness of existence as such; I felt the bittersweet but extraordinarily exhilarating taste of actual existence in my mouth, the taste of its infinite preciousness and yet precariousness, and of its unspeakable difference from nonexistence. I felt I had somehow broken through to a new level of consciousness, and this indescribable taste of existence still lingers in my mouth today, almost as clear as it was then, fifty years ago. It still nourishes my metaphysical intuition.

Later, as a young Jesuit philosophy student, I had the good fortune to climb a real alp, the ten-thousand-foot Schesaplana on the border between Austria and Switzerland, with a Swiss Jesuit guide. We reached the edge of a glacier near the top by nightfall, slept in a hut on its edge overnight, then crossed the glacier and climbed the last five hundred feet to the summit for sunrise. The resulting vista of snowcapped peaks, valleys, rivers, towns, all woven into a single vast tapestry, blew my mind, lifting me into a kind of altered state of consciousness in which I got a glimpse into the essence of majesty, sublimity, purity, and beauty. It has left traces ever since in the deepest recesses of my memory.

Since that time I have always seized the opportunity to go to any mountaintop or high place of vision I could find. Mount Mansfield, the famous ski mountain of Stowe, Vermont, with its 360-degree vista from Lake Champlain to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, has long been one of my favorites, and I have been there many times. On my first trip to India I was able to savor what is justly considered one of the great sights of the world, sunrise over the Himalayas, including Mount Everest, seen from the eighty-five-hundred-foot-high Tiger Hill in Darjeeling. There was also a quick side trip into the fabled tiny mountain kingdom of Sikkim on the edge of Tibet (now absorbed into India), and finally a vanishing act from an international philosophy congress into Nepal to spend the night in the mountains and take the famous Mount Everest airplane ride in a tiny plane right along Mount Everest and the great peaks—a ride during which I got so excited I had to close my eyes to avoid exploding inside. This was the fulfillment of a persistent childhood dream to some day look upon the “ultimate mountains of the earth,” which in fact seemed to me like immense white-robed contemplatives, their faces lifted toward the heavens in the ultimate liturgy of the earth.

I have put such stress on the pull of the high places because of the special role it played in my philosophical (not to mention my spiritual) life, and, I think, in the lives of many metaphysicians. The peculiar connection between metaphysics and the high places seems to me to be this: the great panoramic vistas one gets from such places are like a concrete visual symbol of a metaphysical synthesis, first lived before it is thought. What I loved about such vistas was first, the exhilarating expansion of consciousness produced by the sudden, almost limitless expansion of horizon, and second, the ability to see from one high vantage point how all the multiplicity of hills, valleys, rivers, town, lakes, etc., came together into a unified pattern, the one in the many. This is like an archetypal symbol of the

intellectual vision of the metaphysician, who is always trying to see the whole of reality from a vantage point where the whole comes together into a meaningful, unified pattern. This intellectual vision from a higher vantage point of the One and the many, the One in the many, is really what I have been pursuing throughout my whole career as a metaphysician, dimly prefigured in those first days of climbing to the tops of trees in the West Side Park.

Other dimensions of nature, especially water and forests, have played an important role in nourishing my inner development. But mountains and waterfalls remain the great natural psychic re-energizing centers for me, and both carry the mysterious “charge” of archetypal symbols for me. I would like to ask each one of you, my listeners: What role has the experience of nature played in *your* philosophical development?

In my two years in college, at Georgetown University, I fell in love, of course, with the great Romantic nature poets, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, and also made contact with the great mystical tradition of the West. There were many other intellectual adventures during these college years impossible to go into here, including the initiation into a secret group of disciples trained each year by a brilliant but highly controversial young Jesuit priest-theologian, Father Francis Burke. What we did not realize was that he was on the verge of passing over the edge of sanity into a heterodox mysticism of actual identification with Christ, which led him to “ordain” the next year’s group as the Twelve Apostles and lead them down to a Jewish synagogue in Baltimore on Good Friday to try and get himself crucified. The results were disastrous but not fatal. He finally died mysteriously of lack of insulin at the age of thirty-three—as he had predicted—on his way to New Mexico to have himself actually crucified in the Good Friday rites of the outlawed Penitential Brethren there. We learned much from him, however, in very exciting ways before he went over the edge. As a result I too joined the Jesuits and happily absorbed a more sober Christian vision.

Exposure to a Great Thomistic Metaphysician

The first exposure to a great teacher in one’s future field can be a decisive experience. It was for me. I had the great good fortune to be sent with three other Americans to the French Jesuit House of Philosophical Studies on the Isle of Jersey just off the coast of Normandy. There I was introduced to Thomism and metaphysics by André Marc, one of the leaders of

the French branch of Transcendental Thomists (inspired by Joseph Maréchal of Louvain), a powerful, creative, and highly systematic metaphysical mind of the first order. He introduced me to the Thomistic act of existence and the essence/existence structure of the universe, which seemed to me like the key to the universe I had always been looking for. He taught me by example how to combine synthetic intuitive vision with careful systematic explication, as he performed the remarkable tour de force of starting with a single empirical proposition, “We are,” or “We are together in a common world,” and systematically unfolding from it by the dialectic of the One and the many the entire basic content of Thomistic metaphysics, then natural theology, epistemology, philosophy of man, and even ethics. It was a dazzling but highly demanding performance; I took to it with a passionate intensity, but I fear the heady atmosphere was too much even for many of the young French Jesuits to swallow, intellectually more sophisticated though they were. I would not have the courage to use such a rigorously systematic method with my own American students today. But it did put steel in my metaphysical backbone.

Two Crucial Books

In addition to Saint Thomas, two books played an especially profound and decisive role in my philosophical development. One was Maurice Blondel’s then famous *L’Action* in the first, 1893 edition, which Blondel refused to have reprinted because it was under heavy suspicion and attack by the conservative Catholic establishment in philosophy and theology on the grounds that it philosophically deduced the supernatural order. The book was impossible to buy, save at exorbitant prices. But enterprising students at the Sorbonne had banded together to type out underground copies for their own use. One of the young Jesuits in our house had smuggled in a copy from Paris—it was officially banned for our impressionable young minds—and when one finally reached the inner circle one was allowed to keep it for a week, on the promise to hide it under his pillow—our rooms were periodically checked at that time for diverse contraband. I finally made it, and I will never forget the intoxicating intellectual excitement I felt as I followed the powerful, streamlined unfolding of the natural dynamism in the human will toward the Infinite Good, including in germ the Beatific Vision of God himself, as the only possible, ultimately satisfying goal of the limitless dynamism of the human spirit, presented as a

living paradox of finitude stretched toward infinity. This natural dynamism, transferred to the intelligence also, has been the dynamic underpinning of my own metaphysics ever since. The experience was a genuine metaphysical revelation for me.⁴

The second “book” was the four-volume (later five) set of Maréchal’s own difficult, and also highly controversial, *Le Point de Départ de la Métaphysique*, comprising three volumes of succinct history of the central problems of metaphysics and epistemology up to and including Kant (volume four on Fichte and Hegel appeared later), and the fifth his own systematic presentation of Thomistic epistemology, introduction to metaphysics, and ascent to God through the dynamism of the intellect—all done as a response to the challenge of the Kantian critique, still dominating European thought at that time, the 1920s. I settled down for three months to work my way systematically through these four dense volumes, taking notes as I went.⁵ Though I have since drawn back from certain of the technical positions of the Maréchal school, this experience of metaphysical reflection on the whole development of Western philosophy from one systematic vantage point marked somehow a decisive threshold of philosophic maturity for me. When I closed the last page of the last volume, I suddenly felt that, although there was a vast amount I still had to learn, I had come of age in philosophy, so to speak, and was now a philosopher in my own right, capable of discussing at least basic philosophical questions on a certain level of equality with anyone in the world. It took me some years of the rough and tumble of discussion with more experienced and powerful minds than my own before I was able to regain a more balanced intellectual humility without losing what I still think was a basically healthy and energizing confidence. What books, I ask my listeners, were decisive in your philosophical development?

Key Later Influences

I have time left to indicate briefly only a few of the main ones. During my doctorate studies in Louvain, from 1947 to 1950, I first drank deeply of the newly burgeoning existentialist and personalist thought, then tried to integrate it into a streamlined existential Thomism, with the help of Étienne Gilson, Joseph de Finance, and my Louvain professors of metaphysics, Fernand Van Steenberghen and Louis De Raeymaeker. Then I discovered the dimension of Neoplatonic participation in Saint Thomas,

with the help of Cornelio Fabro and L.-B. Geiger. Existence as act and participation, with all their implications, have been the central pillars of my metaphysical thought ever since: a synthesis of Aristotle and Neoplatonism, together with an abiding, though critical appreciation for Plotinus himself, mystic and metaphysician in indissoluble unity. Later influences when I was teaching at Fordham were a wary but nourishing encounter with linguistic analysis philosophy, when I proposed and taught the first course given on that subject at Fordham—Linguistic Analysis and Language about God—and above all an amateur but deeply challenging and nourishing encounter with some of the great figures and themes of the Asian mystical and metaphysical traditions, which have forced a deepening and partial relativizing of the technical structure of my Thomistically inspired metaphysical and epistemological system. And just within the last years a whole new and exciting stimulus has come to me through theoretical and practical introduction into the depth dimensions of human consciousness through the new movement of consciousness expansion and exploration (Jean Houston, Ira Progoff, guided imagery theory, Silva Mind Control, and a local “Inner Space Travel Club” I was asked to join as a “moderating” influence).

The chief philosophical result of this exposure to the new consciousness-expansion movement has been to force a significant revision of my metaphysical understanding of the relation of individuals to the cosmos. The notion of unifying energy fields on many levels, as a corrective and complement to the sharp distinctness of individual beings, has been the guiding thread. Inspired by such potent and beautiful syntheses as George Leonard’s *The Silent Pulse*,⁶ I now see the universe in such a way that there are indeed genuine individuals, as centers of action, but radiating their energy around them on many different levels, so as to form a vast ordered hierarchy of related energy fields extending all the way from the lowest physical vibratory field up through various levels of psychic and finally spiritual energy fields, transcending space, if not time, in which each center is somehow immanent in every other by its influence, and the Whole in every part. This is a new vision of the One and the many, in continuity with the old, but with significantly new models guiding it.

I must end this still unfinished story here. What is the meaningful pattern behind it all? To what does it point? I can see it myself, not entirely, but clearly enough at sixty-five for it to be both a guiding illumination and a warning. But I am not sure I could or should communicate this unity to anyone else. And the main point of this address is not to highlight my own

story but to invite and stimulate each one of you to gather up the dispersed threads of your own philosophical—and personal—autobiography and allow them to reveal their own meaningful story. As Josiah Royce put it somewhere, “The self is a unified autobiography through time.” I invite you to take reflective possession of your own autobiography.

Interpersonal Dialogue: Key to Realism

One of the most nagging and persistent problems in the history of modern Western epistemology—principally since Descartes and, in a more sophisticated and permanently influential way, since Kant—has been the problem of whether and to what extent we know the external world, the world of the nonself, Kant’s noumenon or “thing-in-itself,” as it really is in itself. I shall not waste time in recapitulating this all-too-well-known history. Suffice it to say that for Kant—and for a large proportion of modern thinkers in the West since his time—one must indeed posit the *existence* of a real world-in-itself, which acts upon our receptive cognitive faculties of sense to provide the “raw material” on which our minds then impose the a priori immanent formal structures of both sense and intellect in order to make these raw data humanly knowable. In a word, the real world provides the matter of our cognition; our own immanent cognitive apparatus, the form.

This is the essence of Kant’s “Copernican revolution.” Our minds are not, as in Aristotle and the medieval Scholastic realist tradition, a receptive potency, or “matter,” as Aristotle calls it, in which our knowledge is informed by the forms of real things, projected intentionally into it. The situation is reversed: the world supplies the matter, and we, the form. Our minds are incapable of receiving any prestructured intelligible forms or patterns from outside; all intelligible or meaningful form is from within. The world is incapable, consequently, of revealing itself in any way as it really is to the human knower, and the human knower is incapable of receiving such a revelation and referring it back to its source in a real

First published in *Person and Community: A Philosophical Exploration*, ed. Robert Roth, SJ (New York: Fordham University Press, 1975), 141–53.

other, known as such in both its existence and its nature. In a word, there is no objective intentionality from world to human knower and from human knower back to world, at least in the dimension of nature, form, or essence—*what* things are in themselves.

It is true that the old, rigid Kantianism, with its apparently timeless and immutable structure of a priori forms of sense and understanding, the same for all people in all ages, has in our day been transformed into new, more relativistic, linguistic modes. These new linguistic forms still postulate that it is we who impose our own immanent forms upon the world, but the a priori forms now are no longer timeless conceptual ones. They are linguistic structures and systems which are indeed a priori for everyone who grows up within them, yet they vary with different cultures and evolve down the ages. The principle that immanent a priori forms come from people and not from things is still there, but it has been transposed into the realm of language and, thereby, relativized and historicized. Kant is still very much with us.

I am well aware that there is quite a different and strong current of thought also with us today beginning from the twentieth century, that of existential phenomenology, that simply refuses on principle even to raise the “bridge” question of whether we know the real world. For such phenomenologists the basic a priori of human knowing is an existential situation: we are always already beings-in-the-world, immersed by our world-oriented intentional consciousness in an enveloping real world already given as both other and yet open to our consciousness, a self-revealing world—and all this before we can even raise any theoretical difficulties about the existence or nature of this symbiotic interrelationship, whose givenness is the very condition of the possibility of our raising any questions about it at all. Hence all skeptical, agnostic, or idealist difficulties about our knowledge of the real world always come too late, after the problem has already been solved by our prereflective lived experience.

There is undoubtedly a great deal of truth in this analysis of the existential situation into which we are already plunged without our having any say about the matter. Still it seems to me that the reflective philosophical mind cannot rest content simply with this *fait accompli*. It would like to know in addition, if possible, just how it is that we do come to know this real world and how it is possible for this to be the case—that is, the conditions of possibility of the admitted fact. Furthermore, it seems quite possible to inject a considerable dosage of Kantian apriorism and agnosticism into this existential-phenomenology framework. The human knower

might still be the source of all meaning, imposed on the brute givenness of the world, à la Sartre. Such a compromise blend of existential phenomenology and Kantianism is in fact the position of not a few today. It seems to me, then, that no matter what school of philosophy one belongs to, the basic Kantian problem of how and how well we know at least the *nature* of the real world around us is still very much with us, and is indeed of its nature one of those central and perennial philosophical problems which no responsible epistemologist or metaphysician can ignore. It is also one that no latest fashion in conceptual revolutions à la Kuhn can long brush under the rug.

In the present article, I intend to propose a defense of epistemological realism which is simultaneously a refutation of the basic Kantian principle that it is the human knower's mind that imposes forms on the world and not the world on the knower. This defense will be based on a datum of human experience that no reasonable philosopher is in a position to deny, and yet the implications of which seem to have been strangely overlooked in the history of epistemology, most conspicuously in the Kantian and other immanentist traditions. This is the phenomenon of interpersonal human dialogue: that is, successful, intersubjective communication through meaningful, mutually comprehended, linguistic dialogue. The two main points I shall make are (1) that the experience of successful dialogue is an incontrovertible fact and provides the strongest evidence we have of a realistic theory of knowledge: namely, that our minds are able to know to a significant degree the nature or intelligible structure of something real outside of our own minds; and (2) that Kantianism is in principle incapable of explaining the two facts implied in the achievement of such dialogue: namely, (*a*) that we know there are other real persons, other real entities distinct from ourselves whose *natures* we know as pretty much like our own; and (*b*) that we are able to communicate intelligently with them through language, that is, receive and send messages substantially intact from one to the other.¹

Realistic Implications of Dialogue

Let us start with the data of experience. It is a fact which no reasonable philosopher can deny, under pain of abandoning dialogue with fellow philosophers and rendering even his or her denial empty because it is addressed to no one, that (1) we live in a human community of other real

persons like ourselves; (2) we communicate meaningfully with them through language; and (3) we know with sufficient assurance that both the above assertions command our reasonable assent. The very fact that Kant himself wrote and had published his *Critique of Pure Reason* is evidence enough that he too accepted these data, at least implicitly, as suppositions which are taken for granted and existentially lived.

The remarkable thing about a genuine human dialogue is that two human beings, each equally real and distinct from the other—and quite evidently aware of this—actually succeed in communicating meaningfully with each other, despite all the physical media and cognitive processing apparatuses which intervene. Thus, in a genuine dialogue (not just two overlapping monologues, as some conversations unfortunately are) one person asks a question, the answer to which is not known, waits expectantly for an answer, and then experiences receiving an incoming answer from the other, an incoming communication of which the person knows he or she is not the author, and which enlightens or *informs* the person about something he or she did not know before. Even without the question-and-answer format, one undergoes in a dialogue the experience of being informed, of learning something new from the other, if only about the other's thoughts, feelings, desires. And this shared communication comes through in a language which both understand, as learned from a common community transcending both of them. No one creates out of whole cloth and teaches to himself a living language.

Such are the data. The epistemological implications of such an existential situation are extremely rich and—astonishingly—systematically ignored not only by Kant but by almost the whole immanentist tradition. Let me unpack these implications one by one.

1. I know—obviously, but we might as well make it explicit—that I as a participant in this dialogue am real, exist, precisely because I am aware of myself actively putting questions, listening, waiting expectantly, receiving, and being enlightened by, the answer. I know myself as agent and patient (recipient).

2. I know the existence of the other participant in the dialogue as real, because I experience myself as positively and determinately acted on, informed, molded in my consciousness in a way which I cannot originate or control, or even anticipate precisely, but must to a significant degree passively receive from an other-than-myself. This immediate awareness of being acted on, of being actively molded by an independent agent not

under my control, constitutes to my mind the primary—and I might add indispensable—evidence for any immediate (noninferential) knowledge of the existence of a real other.²

So much even a Kantian might without too much difficulty be induced to admit, if he is limited simply to the assertion of the *existence* of some real other acting on me. Such in fact is the basic condition of possibility of his own theory of the human mind as the imposer of form on “matter” or data actively presented to it by a real world of things-in-themselves. But I part company with Kantianism when it comes to our ability to know the *nature* of these real agents upon us, *what* they are like in themselves independent of our own imposition of sensible and intelligible forms upon them. It is significant to note here that the usual context of a Kantian analysis of knowledge seems to be that of the knower as thinker trying to understand a mute, nonpersonal, material world opposite the knower, which provides the knower only with raw data to be interpreted but which cannot dialogue with him through a shared language. The human knower alone in such a “dialogue” does all the talking—if only the inner talking of thinking. The world cannot answer back directly if the human knower personally interprets it incorrectly. It is an agent, but a mute one. In the case of such a one-sided, or at least unequal, “dialogue” between a human person and the subpersonal material world, there may indeed be a certain initial plausibility in supposing that the human knower imposes his or her own a priori forms and categories on the data supplied by the world (although in fact I do not believe that this explanation will stand up long either under a critical examination of the scientific process itself).

3. But the situation is quite different in the case of a dialogue between two people carried on in language. When I listen to someone else speaking to me, answering my question, I am not imposing my own a priori formal patterns on the raw material of sound coming from the other person, structuring it any way I wish (or any way my immanent nature demands). The message comes to me precisely *as a message*, already prestructured by the sender into an intelligible, meaningful pattern incarnated in the material medium of sound—a message which I must receive and understand substantially as it already is in the mind and words of the *other real person* if I am to carry on a successful dialogue at all. The whole point here is that to receive a meaningful message in human language is to receive an already structured, formal, and intelligible pattern from a real source outside of me, and already pre-existing in this other. This means that my

cognitive faculties are in principle and in fact capable—given the appropriate conditions—of *receiving* already constituted formal structures from the outside basically as they pre-exist independent of my own cognitive activity, and I am not merely capable of imposing my own forms on amorphous raw data. A similar conclusion could be drawn from an analysis of the even more basic phenomenon of learning an already constituted language from an already established community into which I come. The essence of any communication situation is that two or more real participants share—communicate and receive—substantially the *same* formal message (despite the always present but more or less minor, inessential, distortion of “noise” in the system).

4. Another immediate implication of the dialogue situation is that the very fact of carrying on a meaningful dialogue with another implies that in understanding the communication of another through a shared language and conceptual framework, I thereby and at the same time understand a great deal about the *nature* or kind of being of the other who is communicating and revealing his or her mind to me; namely, that the other human is an intelligent being communicating through linguistic, sense-transmitted symbols as I do—which is not a bad definition of a human.

My conclusion from all this is that the implications of the interpersonal-dialogue situation open an irreparable breach in the fundamental Kantian principle that our minds cannot receive objective form from real things outside of us but can only impose their own forms on the raw data furnished by the real but not-further-knowable-in-itself outside world. The essence of any meaningful communication situation, on the contrary, is that one does receive, as well as communicate, the same formal shared message from one real pole of the dialogue to the other.

Let me hasten to admit, however, in anticipation of the obvious Kantian riposte, that when I receive a message from someone I do indeed attach a certain dosage of personal interpretation—setting it in the context of my own presuppositions, biases, fears, desires, expectations, etc., both conscious and unconscious, adding on my peculiar emotional coloring of the moment. No one receives in a purely neutral, nakedly objective way a message of any existential significance from another real person—though one might, of course, do so in such purely formal matters as logic and mathematics.

All this is true—and one reason why the realism we are defending must be called a “moderate” realism and not an exaggerated or pure picture-copy type. But the fact remains that, despite the more or less considerable aura of interpretative coloring which I add, I still receive and understand *substantially the same message* as was sent out to me by my interlocutor. Otherwise, there is simply no meaningful *communication* at all; hence, no genuine dialogue. Thus if someone reports to me, “There’s a fire in your garage,” the aura of additional feelings, implications, and so on, in which I clothe this message will indeed be my own, and will differ from those imposed on the same message by another hearer. But the core of the message still gets through in its original substantial identity, as unmistakably prestructured by the sender and so received by me, that is, a *fire*, and not a flood, in *my garage*; and not in your kitchen.

In the light of all this, it seems to me that there is simply no denying the basic aptitude of my cognitive faculties, at least in the privileged—but extremely common—context of interpersonal dialogue, to be receptive of already prestructured formal patterns pre-existing outside of me, formal patterns which are communicated to me in and through my sense faculties, but also understood by my mind. My total reception of any message in a dialogue is thus an inextricable blend of objective and subjective, but with the essential core a shared objective form.

Inability of Kantianism to Explain Dialogue

The more one reflects on the powerful, realistic implications of successful interpersonal dialogue, the more one is astonished to discover that Kant and the entire subjective idealist tradition seem quite oblivious of the whole dimension of interpersonal communication. Nowhere does Kant take up just how it is possible for our minds, structured as he claims, to know that other human persons, like us in their inner make-up (that is, in their intrinsic natures or essences), exist at all in the real world. Nor does he undertake to explain how two such beings are capable of carrying on meaningful communication with each other through a common shared language, learned by both as already prestructured by a previously existing community. There seems to be no way I can see in which his system could absorb such data of our everyday experience. Yet it is perfectly obvious that he is constantly presupposing both these facts, taking them for granted, by the very fact of taking active part, as he did, in philosophical dialogue with

his contemporaries and writing his books in the German language precisely in order to get his carefully prestructured message across accurately to them and to convince them of its truth for and about all his fellow humans.

He does indeed assert as part of his system that all human minds have a similar structure of sensible and intellectual forms and categories, and that that is how we can agree on the common structuring of the material world which we call true or objective human knowledge. But this still does not account for the fact *that* or *how* we know that in fact such other similarly structured human knowers exist at all for us to dialogue with, and just how we are able, on his principles, to communicate successfully with them by transsubjective messages in a transsubjective common language. There simply is no theory in Kant of interpersonal knowledge or communication—nor, it seems to me, can there be in principle—yet the acceptance of the fact is the very presupposition of the attempt to write down and communicate the doctrine which would render such knowledge and communication impossible. Quite a paradoxical situation! But surely it is not the first time such a situation has turned up in the history of philosophy.

It would be a fascinating and, I am sure, illuminating exploration in the history of ideas to examine how other philosophers in the general Kantian and allied subjective idealist traditions have handled the problem of the knowledge of other persons and of interpersonal dialogue. But I have not the space to do this here. It is enough to recall the extreme difficulties of the idealist phase of Husserl in our own century in trying to account, by an immanentist theory of the constitution of the object by the transcendental ego, for the knowledge of other personal egos as real and for their meaningful linguistic communication with each other. It is surely not by chance that we observe one after the other of these thinkers either quietly bypassing the whole question or else landing in extreme difficulties in trying to remain consistent with their own Kantian or subjectivist principles. And for good reason, it seems to me. No theory of the purely immanent constitution of either the existence or the nature of all the objects of our cognition can possibly, so far as I can see, cope with the unyielding evidence of the everyday fact of interpersonal dialogue: that we do, in fact, in every meaningful dialogue receive into our consciousness from outside our minds an already prestructured formal pattern constituted substantially by another, notwithstanding the accompanying coloring of subjective interpretation which we superimpose without destroying the clearly recognizable substance of the message. In a word, successful interpersonal dialogue

demands a basic, though carefully qualified, realism in epistemological explanation. And Kantianism is incapable of providing it. We might also note the remarkable—and quite revelatory—fact that no classical modern philosopher before the twentieth century (with the possible exception of Hegel) ever raised the problem of how we know that other human persons are real like themselves or how they can engage in meaningful dialogue with each other, which they obviously take for granted.

Our Knowledge of the Nonpersonal World

I should like now to push the epistemological implications of dialogue a decisive step farther, to include with new qualifications our realistic knowledge not only of the existence—which Kant himself would admit—but also of the nature of the *nonpersonal* material world surrounding us. Once we have broken through the basic Kantian principle and established that our cognitive faculties can in fact be thus receptive of already constituted form from the outside—at least in this one extremely common type of situation, namely, interpersonal dialogue—then what is there in principle to prevent them from being receptive also of other formal structures already pre-existing in real nonpersonal things outside our minds and communicated to us by their nonlinguistic, but just as determinately structured, action on our senses? If we are able in one case to receive a previously structured formal pattern substantially as it is in its source outside of us through sense-transmitted symbols, why should we not be able to do something similar in other cases as well, as long as there is a pre-existent formal structure somehow already there either by art or by nature—does it matter much which?—and communicated to us by an appropriately structured action? For no real action is simply amorphous, indeterminate, totally determinable by its recipient. This is really a contradiction in terms. It follows that all action, as structured and determinate, must to some significant degree be a communication system, conveying something of the active agent to the at least partially passive recipient. Once Kant has admitted that our cognitive faculties are in any way receptive of, actuated or determined by, the action of another, so that we can and must affirm its real existence, he cannot consistently deny that these same faculties are at the same time receptive of the formal patterns which inevitably structure all determinate action.

The alert reader, however, will scarcely need the prodding of a Kantian objector to notice the significant difference between the linguistic communications of an interpersonal dialogue and the nonlinguistic communications of the nonpersonal material world to us. One might well object thus: granted that we are able to receive from the outside formal structures of meaning encoded in language, the reason why we can share these same meanings is that we know how to reproduce similar meanings within ourselves by our own conceptual-linguistic activity. But we cannot do this with the formal structures communicated to us by the action of nonpersonal agents, for neither the content nor the mode of communication is linguistically expressed meanings. We have no way of knowing how the coded patterns into which we transpose all their actions on us correspond to the original formal structures in the thing itself, or what such structures are actually like in their source, since we cannot reproduce them in our consciousness as we can linguistic patterns. We have to translate into our own human coding systems whatever we receive from the outside.

This is quite true. All the structured action-patterns we receive from the outside have to be transposed into our own information-coding systems, which do not in any way directly resemble as an immediate picture-copy the formal patterns as imbedded in their original sources—and even if they did, there is no way we could know this. But the fact remains that no matter how much a message is coded, recoded, transposed into different coding media, the whole point of any successful information-coding operation is that there is a determinate formal pattern in the coded message as received which matches and is positively determined by an isomorphic formal pattern in the sender, though, of course, the respective material embodiments of these isomorphic formal structures in sender and receiver do not have to match. A code after all *is* a code, that is, an informative communication system.

All that is needed, it seems to me, for a successful “moderate” realist explanation of human knowledge is that there be a fixed determinate correlation between the formal structure of the coded communications we receive in our senses and intellects from the material world, on the one hand, and some substantially isomorphic formal structure in the same real world, on the other, even though we can never contact the latter nakedly in itself without the intermediary of our own coding system. This isomorphic correlation of formal structures, determined by the action of the sender on the receiver, and not vice versa, is all we need to construct bit by bit a detailed human-scale map of the world in which we are immersed

in a constant “dialogue” of interaction. Such a map is certainly not as detailed as the real world is in itself, and not on the same scale. But it is informative and accurate enough for our needs and purposes. What we have, therefore, in our experimentally tested knowledge of the nonpersonal material world around us, is a substantially isomorphic map of this world, recreated in our consciousness on a human scale in terms of our own peculiar coding system, but according to a steady flow of coded communications whose formal properties are not imposed by us, à la Kant, but received from and determined by the world itself.

This, to my mind, is the essence of “moderate” realism—a realism which is at its strongest when we are dealing with the knowledge of other human persons like ourselves and with interpersonal linguistic dialogue, and which tapers off with increasing qualification as we descend farther from the human knower into the subpersonal world, but without ever breaking the umbilical cord which links our knowledge to this world by the communication system of action.

To sum up: the basic phenomenon of human dialogue, involving as it does the transsubjective sharing of a common background of meanings and symbols learned from others, plus the sharing of a substantially identical formal message between two real poles, sender and receiver, is the strongest evidence we have for a realistic theory of knowledge, and thereby opens an irreparable breach in the fundamental Kantian principle that the real world supplies only the matter and our minds the form of our human knowledge. Once we have broken through this Kantian principle that our cognitive faculties cannot receive formal structures already established independently of us, the path is open for a “moderate” realist theory of knowledge even of the nonpersonal material world, through the medium of the universal communication system of action, within the matrix of the interaction of the world and ourselves.

There is further very powerful evidence of the basic realism of the nonpersonal world’s self-revelation to us by its informing action upon us. This is the successful feedback of our lived interaction with the surrounding outside world. Guided by what we know from the action of the world on us, we are able to successfully find food and lodging for survival and construct effective tools to protect ourselves most of the time from injury or destruction by the surrounding environment.

Causality and Time

It takes only a modest sampling of current writing to verify what one of the latest books on causality calls “the bewildering confusion prevailing in contemporary philosophic and scientific literature.”¹ In this essay I would like to discuss a facet of the analysis of causality which seems to me in need of special clarification. This is the relation between causality and temporal sequence. Does the relation of cause to effect involve a temporal priority of cause *as cause* over its effect?² That such is the case is widely assumed or explicitly argued by many contemporary philosophers, especially philosophers of science, and by no means only by empiricists. Let us look at a few characteristic examples. The first are from representatives of the empirical tradition (with apologies to Dewey for including him in a category that he transcends at many other points):

By the nature of the case, causality, however it be defined, consists in the sequential order itself. . . . In fact, causality is another name for the sequential order itself.³

Causality, as a universal law, will then be the following: Given any event e_1 , there is an event e_2 , and a time interval t such that, whenever e_1 occurs, e_2 follows after an interval t . I am not concerned as yet to discover whether this law is true or false. . . . I am merely concerned to discover what the law of causality is supposed to be.⁴

Next, from two philosophers of science:

When two spatially separated occurrences stand in the relation of cause and effect, then the cause is always earlier than the effect. This is an explicit denial

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of the claim that the causal relation can be sustained only by simultaneous events. Thus, the theory of relativity denies Aristotle's and Aquinas's claim that with the cessation of the cause, the effect ceases also.⁵

There are only two fundamental relations in the universe: that of *successive causal connection* and that of *contemporary causal independence*.⁶

Last, from two metaphysicians:

Causality therefore means this, that the series of states in process do not flow out of each other at random, but in a determined order, so that in the sense of temporal succession one state is dependent on another, that is, one brings forth [*hervorbringt*] the other. The earlier state is "cause"; the later is "effect." One brings forth; the other is brought forth.⁷

A cause precedes its effect in time. When the cause is, the effect is not; when the effect is, the cause is not. . . . An actual cause cannot have an actual effect when that cause exists, without destroying the temporal gap between cause and effect; an actual effect cannot have an actual cause without destroying the temporal distance between it and its cause. But an actual cause has a possible effect, an effect that *can* but does not yet exist; an actual effect has a past cause, a cause that *did* but does not now exist.⁸

The acceptance of temporal sequence as a property of the causal relation is held almost universally by modern scientists, insofar as they attempt to work out the philosophy of their own methodology.⁹ The precise point I would like this essay to focus on is whether it is possible to hold an ontological realism of causal action, to hold a genuine causal *efficacy* or influx of being from one thing to another, and still maintain that cause and effect form a temporal sequence. My aim, therefore, is not to refute Hume or prove the existence of causal efficacy in the universe.¹⁰ It is merely to draw out the necessary implications of a realism of causal productivity. This will, I hope, help to clarify the choice between viable metaphysical possibilities, obscured at present, it seems to me, by much fuzzy thinking on this point. To throw my cards on the table without further ado, I would like to submit that, outside of a deliberate and quite legitimate restriction of the meaning of "causality" within the discourse of empirical science to mean "predictability according to law (either deterministic or statistical)," the philosopher must make an option between (1) objective causal efficacy with simultaneity of cause and effect, and (2) temporal sequence of antecedent and consequent without causal efficacy. There is no straddling the fence.

It might be wise to add that the question is not, as some might think, a mere luxury of finicky metaphysical speculation. The repercussions of the temporal-sequence theory are far-reaching. One obvious implication, for example, is that no causal action could be exercised by, or on, beings that are not immersed in the flux of time and, therefore, of change. One would then have to choose, as John Hospers has pointed out, between a God who is cause of the world, and therefore immersed in time, and a God who is outside of time, and therefore cannot be the cause of the world.¹¹

The proper way to begin, if one had the space, would be with an historical introduction on the development of philosophical opinion on the problem. This, I am certain, would prove an unusually interesting study in the history of ideas, and one that has not yet been adequately done. Since such a project is out of the question here, a brief recall of a few key landmarks will have to suffice for purposes of orientation.¹²

Aristotle expressly defends the simultaneity of cause and effect as an essential piece in his doctrine of efficient causality. In the *Posterior Analytics* he adduces in its favor an ingenious argument which has important, but unexplored, metaphysical undertones. Aristotle asks us to suppose there is a time-lapse between cause and effect and then to place ourselves, by hypothesis, at some point within the interval. At this precise moment it will be impossible to deduce with certainty that the effect will actually and necessarily follow the cause, since it is always possible for some other impeding cause to enter upon the scene and block the emergence of the effect. Thus it would no longer be possible to construct certain and necessary demonstrations from cause to effect—the most perfect type of proof—and the whole theory of demonstration would be undermined. To be metaphysically satisfactory, however, the grounds for this causal necessity, taken here for granted, would have to be justified.¹³

The more solid metaphysical argument for the position is based not on the property of necessity but rather on the more basic Aristotelian thought, handed down in its classical Latin, that shows that the categories of action and passion are identical in the real order and distinct only in concept. The action of the agent is shown to consist, not in any change or motion in the agent or between the action, but in the very production of the effect in the “patient,” or the effect itself as being produced. The productive action of the cause, therefore, takes place, properly speaking, not within the cause but within the patient: it *is* the emergence of the effect itself as from or due to the cause. Hence the action and the passion, the producing and the being produced, are strictly identical in the real

order and ontologically located in the subject affected. They are distinguished conceptually, however, in terms of the relations involved. Action is the effect-being-produced considered as from or due to the agent. Passion is the identical effect considered as received or residing in the patient. Causing and being caused are not, therefore, two events, one taking place in the agent and the other later in the patient. They constitute a single ontological event. It follows necessarily and obviously that it is impossible for them to be anything else than simultaneous. The above doctrine can be summarized as the single-event theory of causality.¹⁴

This central insight lasted unchallenged as long as the Aristotelian metaphysical tradition remained dominant, that is, as long as efficient causality continued to be viewed in ontological terms as a making-to-be, an influx or influence in the order of being, a real productivity in some way or other.¹⁵ With the advent of Ockham and the Nominalist tradition the atmosphere began to change. The fact of causal efficacy and the necessity of the principle of causality were by no means denied by Ockham. In fact, they are essential to his system, with its constant recourse to the unshackled omnipotence of the First Cause. But the heavy dose of empiricism in his metaphysics and epistemology, in particular the denial of real relations and the resultant atomizing of the created universe into self-enclosed things each of which is separated from every other, made it impossible for him to give any metaphysical analysis or justification of causal efficacy. There was a sheer affirmation of the fact, taken as a datum either of common sense or of the revealed doctrine of creation.

Since causal efficacy or influx of being as such is not empirically observable, the only criterion left for recognizing causality is regular sequence: if A is posited, B ordinarily follows, and if A is not posited, B ordinarily does not follow. Briefly, since all we receive from the world is individual sense impression, that is, individual sense impression of anything observable passing over from cause to effect, no causal efficacy can be affected—only succession. Thus we find Ockham frequently (though not always) defining causality in terms not of influx or communication of being, but of priority and posteriority, recognizable empirically in terms of temporal succession, though he is careful never to deny the unobservable productive power presumed to be at work, at least on the part of God, beneath the observable succession.¹⁶ The tendency is already at work in Ockham, and even more clearly in his successors, to substitute the epistemological for the ontological perspective, that is, to define the nature of causality by

the criterion of its empirical recognition by our minds, namely, temporal succession.¹⁷

The rationalists from Descartes to Leibniz appeared to restore to honor the metaphysical principle of causality, but at the price of transforming its content more and more into a necessary connection of ideas rather than an active existential influx of one being on another.¹⁸ Hume took up where the Nominalists left off. His radical rejection of the very existence, or at least knowability, of objective causal relations outside the mind is too well known to need development here. From this point on in modern philosophy the whole problem of causality is shifted from the order of being to our mode of knowing and ordering being, and there for the most part is where it has remained. Few since Hume have expressed more clearly and uncompromisingly the position that all so-called causal relations are nothing more than the regular temporal sequence of antecedent-consequent within the order of our own mental impressions.¹⁹ The subsequent forms of modern empiricism, including logical positivism, have added only minor refinements to his classic, pure position. Even where they have mitigated his subjective phenomenalism in favor of some realism of the objects of our knowledge, they have always clung tenaciously to regular temporal sequence, with no hidden metaphysical influx or “ontological glue” as the essence of the causal relation.²⁰

The position of Kant is far more nuanced and richer in metaphysical sensitivity. But the balance he tries to maintain between the latter and the Humean empiricism to which he is also committed is unstable and not always internally consistent. He insists, of course, that the category of causality cannot legitimately be extended beyond the order of phenomena to things in themselves. In addition, the necessary empirical criterion for recognizing causality is temporal sequence. Nevertheless he is unwilling to allow that causal sequence is nothing but pure temporal sequence according to regular law. He admits from traditional metaphysics, though without any attempt at justification, not only that substances must be thought of as exercising a certain force or action on each other, but also that most causes and effects *in nature* are actually simultaneous rather than successive. Still he argues that, although there is properly speaking no *lapse* of time between cause and effect, there is nevertheless a definite *order* or direction in time between the two.²¹

In the last analysis, however, this interesting attempt to combine the traditional Aristotelian doctrine of the simultaneity of cause and effect with the Humean temporal sequence, through the notion of order in time

without lapse of time, is never adequately explained and justified on Kant's own principles and it has no significant consequences in the application of the causal category. For he still insists that the latter remains an empty logical relation until it is combined with the sensible intuition of the phenomena as ordered in space and time. Hence the necessary empirical criterion for the application of the causal principle will always be the succession of antecedent and consequent in the order of time.²² It is essential to note, in summary, that despite Kant's parenthetical concession to the simultaneity theory, he still conceives the causal situation as *two* distinct events or phases of a process which need to be linked together by some further law of intelligibility.

This basic conceptual model of causality, a two-event process linked in time, has passed into subsequent modern philosophy for the most part without question, even among those who do not subscribe to the outright empiricism of Hume or the partial idealism of Kant. One of the most potent influences tending to perpetuate it has been the theory of the physical universe as a space-time continuum, introduced by Einstein and given quasi-philosophical elaboration by numerous contemporary philosophers of science. The relevant point in this theory, so far as the notion of causality is concerned, is that no cause in the physical universe can produce an effect at another point in space without some lapse in time, which can never be smaller than the absolute measure of all physical intercommunication, that is, the speed of light in a vacuum. Thus the following two general principles are deduced: (1) all events which are causally connected are temporally successive; and (2) all events which are temporally simultaneous are causally independent.²³ Quantum physics, no doubt, has forced a radical revision of the meaning of regular succession, law, and predictability as applied to individual subatomic events. The strictly deterministic laws of classical physics have had to be replaced in this domain by probability curves and statistical laws.²⁴ But the law of temporal succession, without which the problem of predictability could not even be formulated, still remains inviolate.

Such is the widely accepted contemporary concept of the causal relation: either it is nothing else than the regular temporal succession of two or more events according to law; or, if real ontological influx is also maintained, temporal succession is also involved as an essential property. The point of this paper is that such a concept of real efficient causality, as involving a time sequence between the cause *as* cause, or the causal action, and its immediate effect, is simply not viable as an ontological theory. If

one stays within the bounds of the aims, methods, and carefully delimited concepts of empirical science and defines causality as lawful succession permitting predictability, there is no philosophical confusion. There is only the legitimate problem of how strictly to interpret the terms and to fix precisely where they apply. If one is a thoroughgoing empiricist in philosophy, there is no confusion either, though the adequacy of the basic position might be raised. But there is irremediable confusion if one attempts to maintain both the temporal succession of cause and effect and the objectivity of truly ontological causal influx or active efficacy of cause on effect.

To bring this out, I do not think elaborate arguments are necessary. The operative insight seems to me so basic and, once clearly gotten into focus, so inevitable, that what is really needed is not so much proof as clarification of concepts (or of meaningful language, as the British analysts would put it). This involves, principally, disengaging the causal relation in its purity from the constellation of accompanying conditions which can so easily be confused with it, and then properly locating the time sequence which is obviously associated in some way with most of the causal activity in our experience.

Perhaps the simplest way to bring out these features of the causal relation is to ask the following: "Granted that in the real order there takes place an effective action of one being on another, an active influence of one on the other, can such a situation involve two events somehow related to each other, namely, the event of causing and the event of being caused, or one single event?" Only the latter alternative, I submit, can stand up under analysis. If causal action or productivity is an ingredient of the real world at all, then it can consist in nothing less than the actual producing-*of-its-effect*, the actual exerting-*of-its-influence* *on* some recipient, the efficacious making-its-effect-to-*be*. It cannot possibly consist in some first action or event back in the cause, which is not yet itself the producing of the effect but which must somehow deploy itself further and subsequently bring about another event over in the patient, bring about the actual emergence of the effect. In this case, only the second event would be the actual, efficacious production. The first event is not yet effectively causal at all and hence becomes either superfluous or merely preparatory to dispose the agent for the actual exercise of its causal action in the second event. No action which remains self-enclosed, which terminates in the agent *as* agent, can be properly causal. Causal action is by its very essence relational, outward-focused, *ecstatic*, the dynamic immanence or presence of

one being in another. Causal action taken properly and strictly as such is, therefore, either one single ontological event linking two beings (or two distinct elements within one being) in an indivisible relational unity, or else it cannot take place at all and is strictly unintelligible myth when applied to the real order. It can be nothing less than the real dynamic union of cause and effect in the order of action, not of essence or formal structure or any other nonrelative property, constituted by the active presence or immanence of the cause in its immediate effect, and lasting as long as the causal action endures. The myth of action as some kind of entity which *passes* or *travels* through space and time from the cause to its effect must be exorcised uncompromisingly; it destroys the specific intelligibility of what it is trying to explain.²⁵

Such causal relationship cannot help but be temporally simultaneous, and this for two reasons. First, causal action and its effect form a dynamic ontological identity at the moment of action, resulting from some mode of presence by the power of the cause in the effect. Second, such action is through and through relational—intentional, if you will, by analogy with the self-transcendence of consciousness and appetite. It is precisely the influencing *of* another, the communication *to* another of some mode of being. And all relations, by the very nature and intrinsic intelligibility of relation as such, require that both their terms be simultaneously present to each other. If the relation is to be real, or outside of an idea in the real order, then its terms must actually exist in simultaneity. If they do not, then the relation can be only potential or else mental, existing in a mind. But even in the latter case the two terms must at least be thought as co-present in a simultaneous cognitive field. Thus different moments of time can be related to each other directly only by a mental, not a real, relation.²⁶ Hence causal action is either real *and* simultaneous with its effect, or it is not real at all.

It must be candidly admitted, even expressly emphasized, that, however necessary may be the fact, the nature of the *active ecstatic immanence* of the cause in the effect remains mysterious and is a source of wonder to us as we try to reduce it to clear abstract concepts. It stubbornly resists integral transposition from the existential level of experience to the abstract mode of intelligibility, as is possible for forms absent from matter. But this is precisely what we should expect. The human intellect is most at ease in representing conceptually the formal structures of things. The dynamic and existential aspects of reality it is indeed intellectually aware of, either by inner experience or by vital continuity with its senses. But it is very

difficult to represent them clearly in an abstract concept detachable from the concrete experience and communicable to others in precise scientific language. The human mind must have recourse to metaphors and special indirect pointing concepts which enable it to recognize what is being talked about and discuss its significance, necessary conditions of possibility, and implications.²⁷

If this difficulty is present, and widely admitted with respect to existence itself and other existential properties such as subjectivity, personality, freedom, love, etc., then should it not be even more true in the case of action, the most purely existential, dynamic, and nonformal mode of being which is conceivable?²⁸ For action is not a form or essence of any sort, but a pure dynamic “overflow” or “gift of being,” as Gilson has called it, from cause to effect.²⁹ Perhaps it is the unwillingness, on the part of both rationalists and doctrinaire empiricists, to make sufficient place in their philosophy for this dimension of mystery, of transconceptual existential fecundity, of the dynamism beyond local motion at the heart of causal action, that has led them to persistent attempts to reduce efficient causality to something besides the action of real existents.

The central point of the foregoing analysis is that if authentic causal action exists at all, it and its effect make up one single indivisible event, not two distinct events which then require somehow to be joined together. This pinpoints what, to my mind, is the most persistent source of confusion in the treatment of the problem by all those who defend a temporal sequence between a cause *as* cause and its effect. Practically without exception one finds that the unquestioned presupposition commanding the very formulation of the question is that cause and effect as such form a series of two events. The precise problem then becomes how to relate or connect them to each other. But once one accepts this two-event position of the problem, the case is already settled. Either causal influence, properly so called, will be decreed nonexistent since it is not only unobservable but unintelligible (as indeed it is in the two-event theory), and the only discernible index of the so-called causal relation will become temporal sequence; or else, if one wishes to hold on to the reality of causal efficacy in the physical universe, one will have to allow that all distinct physical events are separated both in space and time and require a time span to intercommunicate (unless, of course, one is prepared to reject the whole Einsteinian model of the universe). In the single-event theory, on the other hand, there simply is no problem of how to relate two events distinct in space

and therefore in time. Simultaneity is not only possible here but strictly necessary.

Does not the above analysis, however, fly in the face of the obvious facts of our experience? Causal activity in the world around us is undeniably bound up somehow with temporal process. It does take time to do things. The answer lies not in attempting to deny that temporal sequence accompanies most of the causal activities we know, but in situating it properly. The proper point of insertion of temporal process is either within the cause, or within the effect, or within both, but not between them. If a cause possessed all the power required for the production of a given effect in a total, completely available actuality, concentrated in a single indivisible point or center, no successive phases would be required *within* the cause for unfolding its causal action, hence there would be no temporal process. The cause would then remain perfectly motionless and unchanging internally, though the effect on its part might be such that its emergence could or would have to occur in successive stages. In this case, time would unroll within the effect, though not within the cause.

Now none of the causes accessible to our experience possess their active powers in such simple, concentrated plenitude and totally available actuality. They can deploy their energy only piecemeal, in successive acts, with some kind of change or motion, internal or external, alternating between each outflow of effective action and disposing the agent for one that is to come. Such motion itself, especially the local motion which seems always to accompany material activity, is not yet the effective causal action, though it may mediate or carry it. The fact that it is present at all is due, not to any exigencies of causal action as such, but to the imperfection of the cause, namely, to its lack of total actual self-possession and/or immediate presence to its effect. The only type of cause that can overcome this defect of unity, actuality, and total presence to itself and others is one that is completely immaterial or unextended in any way, a spirit, in other words. Even here only an infinite, omnipotent, and omnipresent spirit could exhaust its relations to the whole rest of the universe in a single act, though each successive act of a finite spirit would be a simple instantaneous unit. Now none of the at least partially material beings which form the world of our ordinary and scientific experience are such as are described above. Hence it follows that, in this world, causes and effects will both move together, locked in ontological embrace at every moment through the flux of time and change in which material beings are immersed. Time will infiltrate inescapably *within* both cause and effect, but

never between them. And the primary root of this time factor is local motion, the necessary condition, it seems, of the activity of all material agents as we know them.

We are now in a position to understand the transformation of meaning that the concepts of “causal relation” and “principle of causality” will have to undergo to be of any use in empirical science. The primary aim of such sciences is to construct a system of laws and theories which will permit the deduction and prediction of one given set of observable phenomena from another. Now it is obviously impossible to predict the immediate effect from its cause in the case of simultaneous causal relations, where the efficacious action of the cause is ontologically identical with the effect being produced. The only kind of sequences to which this method will apply are temporally successive ones between two or more distinct phenomena or events, which permit prediction from the earlier to the later. It is not even relevant scientifically whether ontological causality is involved at all, as long as the sequences occur regularly according to law, at least according to statistical probability law. Even if the scientist happens to be dealing with an authentic causal chain, the only relations he can pick out appropriate to his aim and method will be those between given causal links and their *remote* effects, at least one generation removed, never their immediate effects. (Certain at least apparently simultaneous relations, such as pulling–being pulled, etc., can of course be described as a unit; but the second member cannot be predicted or deduced from the first. It is already too late to talk about anything simultaneous.)

It will be part of the scientist’s art, therefore, to single out in a given chain of observable phenomena, whether ontologically causal or not, those particular links which permit significant, fruitful, and accurate prediction of the regular or lawful occurrence of their more or less remote temporal successors in the same chain. The term “causal relation” will thus, on the sound methodological principle that all concepts used in scientific discourse be reduced to their minimum content, take on the meaning of “regular sequence of antecedent-consequent according to law,” or, transposed into epistemological terms, predictability based on such lawful sequence. It follows that there will always be a time gap between every “cause” and “effect” studied by the empirical scientist, precisely because the terms in question will always constitute *two* events distinguishable either in space and time or in time alone. It follows, too, that within the framework of Einsteinian scientific discourse any two spatially distinguishable events if “causally connected” will always be temporally successive,

and if simultaneous will be “causally independent.” But by the same token no causal sequence accessible to scientific analysis will ever be that of a cause *as* cause, that is, of causal *action*, and its immediate proper effect. To sum it up in less abstract terms, the closest empirical science can get to causal *generation* is the grandfather-grandson, never the father-son relationship.³⁰

There is no reason, then, why the scientist and the metaphysician cannot understand or at least respect each other’s legitimately distinct universes of discourse, each focused on distinct and complementary facets of the immensely complex web of reality. But only confusion can result from trying to superimpose the two exposures and trying to solve the problems of the one within the framework and with the tools of the other. Many other difficulties and paradoxes in causal theory remain to be ironed out, I am well aware. This essay tries only to make two concepts clear, and to formulate clearly what the issue is between the single-event and the double-event theories of causality.

System: A New Category of Being?

Since the chances are extremely high that I will never again have the opportunity to address such an influential group of my philosophical companions-in-arms with any semblance of official position or authority, I am going to take advantage of the present occasion, wrapped in the ephemeral dignity of office, to present to you one thought that has been causing me considerable philosophical concern during the last few years. I do not ask you to agree with me, but only to let my problem be a guest in your minds for a few moments and see what chords of harmony (or discord) it awakens within you.

The question I would like to put before you briefly is this. It seems to me that a significant lacuna in Thomistic metaphysics (and in this I include Scholastic metaphysics in general) has been coming into focus more and more clearly in recent years, and that we should do something about it. The lacuna in question concerns the metaphysics of order or “system,” to use the apt contemporary term, as an ontological feature of our universe, and in particular should be added to the classical list of nine, laid down by Aristotle, accepted without change by Saint Thomas and the Scholastic tradition.

Two Ways of Looking at the Universe

THE ARISTOTELIAN OR SUBSTANTIALIST VIEW

What is the difficulty? It arises out of two different ways of looking at the universe, two different aspects of reality to which one can pay predominant attention. From this results a different judgment on the kind of category one considers most necessary and fruitful for our intellectual comprehension of reality.

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One of these ways of looking at the universe I shall call Aristotelian, focused on the unique centrality of substance, the other, the relational view, focused on the equal centrality of the category of relation. Saint Thomas himself lies somewhere in between, but still, it seems to me, a little too close to Aristotle.

According to the first view, the center of gravity of the real world lies unqualifiedly and exclusively in real substances, each individual being existing in itself and not as a part of any other being, as in all the other accidental categories, including relation, and distinct from every other. (The point at issue, it should be noted, is not Aristotle's lack of recognition of the importance of the act of existence as distinct from essence. We are concerned here not with essence versus existence, but only with the modes of existence, that is, the substantial mode as preferred to the relational.) The only categories of reality are accordingly substance and accident, and all accidents, including relations, are conceived of as always individual accidents inhering in some particular substance and individualized by it. Hence the only ontological status of relation as a real mode of being outside the mind is as an individual accident (or as an essential property inhering in an individual substance, not a group, if one holds the theory of essential relations) inhering in one particular substance in the universe and in it alone. Thus whenever two or more substances are interrelated, even in a reciprocal or mutual relation, there are as many relations as there are individual substances. Mutual friendship, for example, is two relations, one rooted in me and reaching toward you, the other rooted in you and reaching toward me. There is no such thing in Aristotelian metaphysics as a *single* relation or set of relations linking, or immanent in, several substances at once.

Now this is fine as far as it goes. But what happens to that aspect of reality which we call order or system? Certainly the existence and importance of objective order were recognized by Aristotle, and even more by Saint Thomas. Both had a rich and keen sense of order in the universe. The difficulty lies not in the recognition of the fact but in the explanation of the ontological status of order in a world where the only realities are individual substances and individual accidents inhering in these substances. The order I am concerned with is not that of one individual to its own particular goals or ends, which is well taken care of here, nor with the order of one individual to God or to other individuals as such, which is also well taken care of. I am thinking rather of those types of unified immanent order which link together groups of individuals in such a way

that they form a *single* objectively existing and recognizable order, a single intelligible network or pattern of relations forming a *whole*, or to use the admirably expressive modern term, a *system*.

There are two main levels of reality on which such systems occur: (1) in the infrapersonal world, in the form of systems of particles, atoms, molecules, cells, fields of force of various kinds, systems or animal societies such as beehives, ant colonies, etc., ecological systems of plants and animals with their environment, vast cosmic systems of planets, stars, galaxies, etc.; and (2) in the world of persons, in the form of organic social groups such as families, factories, armies, corporations, national states, and so forth. At the highest level here stands the system of the Church or the Mystical Body of Christ, already in the supernatural, but no less real, order. On both these levels the systems may be either static or, more habitually, dynamically evolving both internally and in relation to each other. Certain systems overlap the two levels, such as works of art, etc. The relevance of the notion of dynamically evolving systems coalescing into progressively larger and more complex systems is obvious for the analysis of evolution.

Now the difficulty of assimilating such features of reality into the framework of the Aristotelian categories begins to become acute, it seems to me, when the unity of order, of the nonsubstantial system or whole as such, becomes so dominant in importance that the members or elements it integrates can neither exist, nor act, nor be understood in their essential intelligibility except in function of the unity of the *system as a whole*. In such cases, where precisely does the unity of the order as a whole, the singleness of the system as such, reside? It cannot be the mere sum or aggregate of all the distinct relations of each of the constituent members to every other. This is a multitude, not a unity. Does it reside, or have its ontological locus, solely in the intentional order, in the mind of its maker? Or is it not really immanent in some way in the group of members outside the mind? Must we be resigned to hold that its unity is not an ontological attribute but solely a mental unity in the mind of its originating cause?

It may be that such an extrinsic intentional unity may be adequate to explain artificial systems like machines. But what of the more intensive unity of many kinds of natural systems? Take the ant colony, for example. Its unity as a single ordered whole, as a biological system, is so powerful and so evident that without it neither the biological structures nor the activities of the individual ants make any sense at all. But if the only modes

of real being are separate substances, that is, the individual ants, and accidents inhering in these individual substances and multiplied by them, that is, the individual relations of every ant to every other, then the ontological reality of the ant colony as such, of the system as a single intelligible relational whole, has evaporated, atomized into an incalculable multitude of individual relations unified only mentally in their cause and not immanently in the members themselves. How then can the ant colony as such, or the beehive, or the field of force, be called a reality? Is it metaphysically satisfactory not to call it such? How can the unity of the Mystical Body, to take a still more powerful example, be situated or discussed at all—I will not say explained—in terms merely of its individual constituent substances and their multiple individualized relations to each other?

THE EQUAL CENTRALITY OF THE CATEGORY OF RELATION
OR THE RELATIONAL VIEW

If we now shift perspectives to the most characteristic type of contemporary *metaphysical* view of the universe, that of Whitehead, we find quite a different picture. Here the center of intelligibility resides almost exclusively in overall patterns of order, relational wholes, systems as such, especially dynamic systems. Substances have been almost totally absorbed into intersecting lines, relations, events, moments in a total process. The accent is on relation and system as the central foci of both being and intelligibility.

Looked at through metaphysical glasses of this type, the ordinary world of easily accessible human experience, rather well taken care of within certain limits by the Aristotelian categories of substance and accidents-inhering-in-substance, gets rather badly out of focus; the ontological density of individual centers of being and action tends to get drained out of it. And yet a whole range of experience that is the special interest and in a certain sense the special competence of modern thought fits easily and naturally (though not without significant leftovers) into this perspective. The whole world of mathematics, which has been called “the form of modern thought,” is dominated by relation and order, and more and more, as we move into the levels of higher mathematics, by overall sets or patterns of relations which have their own unity and properties as intelligible wholes. The world of contemporary physics leans more and more heavily on notions of fields of force and systems of particles within the basic system of the space-time continuum. So too do biology, ecology,

engineering (systems analysis), psychology, sociology, economics, political science, aesthetics, in a word, practically all modern disciplines, even recent theology.

In all these areas, though in some much more than others, one of the most important principles of intelligibility is the unity of order, the overall pattern, *the system as such*. It is primarily by reference to these relational wholes that the individuals integrated into them derive a large portion of their essential and not merely their accidental intelligibility—hence in some way their very being. As Peter Drucker has put it with great clarity and forcefulness in a book that should be unusually stimulating to philosophers, *Landmarks of Tomorrow*, the principle of explanation in most fields of contemporary thought is no longer the old Cartesian one that so long dominated Western thinking, namely, that of the reduction of wholes to their component parts or the explanation of the whole by the part. It is rather just the opposite: the part is now to a certain extent explained by the whole, the individual element by the system.

POSITION OF SAINT THOMAS

Where does Saint Thomas stand with reference to these two points of view? On the one hand, he sees clearly the importance and reality of order in all fields, especially at the human level in its social dimensions, both natural and supernatural, and in the universe as a whole. In this he goes far beyond Aristotle, though along the same lines. He takes a still more decisive step beyond the latter in positing intelligence as the necessary condition of possibility required to set up any finality or order, on the grounds that only an intellect can grasp the relation of means to end. This is indeed an enormous step forward: from order in nature without intelligence to order grounded in intelligence. The ultimate extrinsic cause of all order is thus well taken care of by Saint Thomas. But it does not seem to me that he has gone far enough in working out the metaphysical analysis of the *immanent* ontological status of order within the ordered members themselves, outside of the extrinsic intelligent cause. In a word, he has analyzed the efficient, exemplary, and material causes of order, but not adequately or explicitly enough its intrinsic formal cause and mode of existence. The only categories of real being are individual substance and accident inhering in individual substance. The unity of order or system as such fits under neither, it seems.

The only other alternative left, it would then appear, if one wishes to retain the existing Aristotelian-Thomistic set of categories, is to locate the

unity of order and system solely in the intentional order, that is, in the mind of its maker and/or observer. But again we ask: does the powerful immanent order of a field or force or an anthill exist merely in the intentional order?

Approaches Toward a Solution

Is there any way in which we can integrate both of these perspectives on the universe, the Aristotelian and the more modern relational perspective, into a single metaphysical vision, remaining, if possible, within the basic inspiration and fundamental categories of the Thomistic system? In a word, can our metaphysics allow both substance and the nonsubstantial wholes of system to be real? This seems to me to be one of the most urgent and crucial tasks confronting Thomistic metaphysics today, if it is to survive as a vital philosophy capable of giving adequate speculative expression to the reality it is trying to illuminate, in a way intelligible to, and meeting the exigencies of, contemporary modes of thinking in all fields, but also to express adequately what was already true in Aristotle's own time, where collective nouns were clearly a unique category of everything reflecting the real.

Let me now propose to you very briefly my own suggestion as to how the synthesis might be negotiated within the perspective of an open Thomistic system. It would consist in an extension of the traditional Thomistic theory of correlative metaphysical principles. It would propose that the structure of correlative metaphysical principles be postulated as existing not only between the mutually dependent components *within* a single substance, as has traditionally been held, but also analogously between each *whole* substance in a natural system and the immanent intelligible unity and being of the system itself as such. This real unity of the system would not be capable of existing on its own apart from its members, like a substance. Nor would it be an Aristotelian accident, hence multiplied and fragmented into a multitude of distinct relations inhering singly in each individual substance in the system. Its unity would be a true and real one, an authentic new mode of being in its own right, but one that could exist only in mutual correlation or composition with all its constituent member-substances at once. What would be an appropriate name for such a mode of being or category? Popularly it might be called "togetherness," or, as the Germans put it, *Mitsein*. Technically one could hardly do better, it

seems to me, than the admirably expressive term already so common in contemporary thought, that of "system." Thus the fundamental categories of being would now become substance, individual accident, and system.

Hence every member of the system would participate in a real way in the unity and being of the system, thus becoming intrinsically ordered to, or a part of, the system; and the system on its side would have its own existence rooted in, supported by, and in a real but unique way individualized, though not strictly multiplied, by each of the constituent substances in which it is immanent. It would be a one-in-many, a kind of superaccident, if you will, inhering in many substances at once, or perhaps even, in many cases, a new substantial mode of being (incomplete by itself, of course).

Before such a proposal is judged acceptable, however, it would naturally have to be tested out against other possible alternatives. Let me mention two very briefly. First, one might contend that it is possible to remain within the limits of the Aristotelian theory of accident as individualized and multiplied by the substance in which it inheres, and still account for the unity of a system. Could not one say that the entire identical order or system is multiplied over and over again in each member, rooted in each of the latter by a relation that is single in its foundation but multiple in its term, so that its adequate term would actually be all the other members, together with all their mutual relations to each other as a single relational whole, though seen from the particular angle of vision of this particular participant? Thus the individuation and multiplication of the system would be analogous to that of the same specific form by matter in Thomism.

In answer to this I might say, first, that it is not clear that such a position differs essentially from the one I have outlined; secondly, that it is not clear that a single Aristotelian relation in a noncognitive subject can have as term of reference a whole ordered multitude of other substances and include as well their own mutual relations to each other. If it can, the problem would be solved. Thirdly, the system is not an indeterminate abstract universal like a specific form, but a *single* existential unity in all.

The second major alternative might be that the unity and being or system or order can be adequately explained—indeed must be—in terms of intentional being alone. Thus it could be argued that it is impossible to have a unity of many distinct substances save in the intentional order; if the unity itself were in the physical or real order it would become another individual entity alongside the other members of the system, another unit

among the many and not a unity of the many. Hence the unity and being of the system exists properly only in the mind of the maker (and is reproduced again in the mind of any observer). Only the effects of this extrinsic unity, that is, the correlated action of the members, would exist in the order of real being outside of an idea in a mind.

The first difficulty with this position is that it seems to presuppose the point at issue, that the only true unity and being is a substance or an accident inhering in one substance only. The second difficulty is that it is not easy to see how this position can take care of organic or natural systems, where the relation to the system is built into the very nature of the members. Nature is supposed to be a truly immanent principle of action, the source of action and passion *within* a being. If the order exists and exerts its influence purely from outside the natures of the members, then the activity in relation to the system becomes purely extrinsic, artificial, or instrumental (not even that, if a being has no activity save in a system), and no longer properly natural, that is, proceeding from an immanent principle.

Actually we have here a variant or extension of a long-standing problem never sufficiently analyzed, to my mind, in Thomistic or Scholastic thought. This is the mode of presence of the final cause in a noncognitive natural agent. All agree that in order to influence the action of the agent the final cause must be actually present in some way; that it cannot be present physically and hence must be present intentionally; and that this intentional presence requires an intelligence as total or adequate cause. But Scholastics disagree as to whether the end is *intentionally* present in the noncognitive agent itself or only in its intelligent cause. Those who hold the first have the difficulty of explaining how an intentional being in the proper sense of the term can reside in a noncognitive being. Those who hold the second and describe the whole of nonrational nature as merely an instrument of God have the difficulty of explaining how such agents can really be said to possess any genuine internal natures or immanent principles of activity at all. Saint Thomas remains prudently vague and reserved on the problem, speaking of such natural agents as “*quasi-instruments of God*,” without further elaboration. Since the unity of any natural tendency comes precisely from its end, it does not advance the matter much to say that the end is present in the agent *per modum tendentiae naturalis*. I personally would opt, though I do not think Saint Thomas goes as far as this, for some mode of real, imperfect, analogous participation of every agent, cognitive or not, in the formal intentional presence of

its natural ends in the mind of its maker, in other words, for some kind of participation *in* the intentional order terminating *outside* the realm of intellect itself. The result of such a participation would deserve, it would seem, to be called real in some proper sense. Perhaps this could furnish an analogous model for the similar problem of the immanent existence of the unity of order in the members of a natural system.

In summary, the problem is how to do justice to the *reality* of system and order as a *single immanent* unity in many substances at once. No Aristotelian or Thomistic type of accident, it seems, could adequately fit the bill, since the latter are always multiplied by their multiple foundations. Hence, whether it be explained as a participation in the intentional order or not, it would seem necessary and fruitful, especially in the context of characteristic contemporary modes of experience and thought, to characterize system or a single order-among-many as a new mode of real being, possibly a new type of accident, that is a one-in-many in metaphysical composition with all its constituent members at once, participated in by each in its own way, but not strictly multiplied like a specific form. Thus the basic categories of being would be expanded to three: substance, individual accident, and system (the latter being either substantial or accidental, as the case demands).

A Curious Blind Spot in the Anglo-American Tradition of Antitheistic Argument

Theistic philosophers often tend to assume an inferiority complex, an attitude of defensiveness, in the face of antitheistic argument. They know that their own traditions of argumentation can easily fall into a repetitive rut by failing to incorporate the new insights or adjust to the new challenges of ongoing contemporary philosophy. But they tend to take it for granted that antitheistic argumentation will almost by definition be up-to-date, alert, freshly minted, using the best tools of the latest thought. I would like to submit that antitheistic traditions too can fall into a traditional rut of out-of-date, already discredited, or no longer relevant arguments. They too can become turned in on themselves and self-repetitive, tilting at long dead, if ever existent, adversaries.

One of the most striking examples of this, to my mind, is to be found in one Anglo-American tradition of antitheistic argument. I am referring to one of the most widely and persistently repeated critiques of the so-called cosmological argument for the existence of God. Strange to say, it does not seem to occur with anything like the same frequency in the continental European tradition. And the reason seems to be precisely that it is a tradition, handed down among Anglo-Saxon philosophers from well-defined sources, according to a well-established family tradition, and apparently never seriously reexamined even up to the present date. In the interests of good philosophical argument and fruitful dialogue, for the

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benefit of *both* sides, I would like in the present article to expose the ghost of this curiously long-lived red herring, in the hopes of laying it to rest once and for all among serious philosophical circles. There are all too many weighty philosophical objections to proofs for the existence of God, as it is, for us to waste time on irrelevant ones.

Exposition of the Tradition

Let me introduce this traditional Anglo-American critique in the words of one of its best known and most influential contemporary proponents, Bertrand Russell:

THE FIRST-CAUSE ARGUMENT

Perhaps the simplest and easiest to understand is the argument of the First Cause. (It is maintained that everything we see in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further you must come to a First Cause, and to that First Cause you give the name of God.) . . . The philosophers and the men of science have got going on cause, and it has not anything like the vitality it used to have; but, apart from that, you can see that the argument that there must be a First Cause is one that cannot have any validity. . . . If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God, so there cannot be any validity in that argument. It is exactly of the same nature as the Hindu's view, that the world rested upon an elephant and the elephant rested upon a tortoise; and when they said, "How about the tortoise?" the Indian said, "Suppose we change the subject." The argument is really no better than that.¹

Russell's critique is, of course, impregnable against the argument as he presents it. Either one takes seriously the principle that every being has a cause, and then one must apply it to God too, thus going on forever, no nearer to a solution of our original problem about this world, or else one should never raise the question at all, and merely accept the existence of the world as a brute given fact.

Russell is by no means the originator of this critique, nor does he claim to be. He recounts in the same book, and also in his account of his mental

development in the Schilpp *Library of Living Philosophers* volume, how as a young man his own belief in the First-Cause argument was rudely shattered by reading the young John Stuart Mill's rejection of it:

I may say that when I was a young man and was debating these questions very seriously in my mind, I for a long time accepted the argument of the First Cause, until one day, at the age of eighteen, I read John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, and I there found this sentence: "My father taught me that the question 'Who made me?' cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question 'Who made God?'" That very simple sentence showed me, as I still think, the fallacy in the argument of the First Cause.²

Neither was Mill's father, James Mill, the originator of the objection. As far as I can discover, the first well-known proponent of it was, as might be expected, the fertile critical mind of David Hume:

I shall prove that there is no ground to suppose a plan of the world to be formed in the divine mind. . . . It is not easy, I own, to see what is gained by this supposition. . . . We are still obliged to mount higher, in order to find the cause of this cause, which you had assigned as satisfactory and conclusive. . . . How therefore shall we satisfy ourselves concerning the cause of that Being, whom you suppose the Author of Nature, or, according to your system of anthropomorphism, the ideal world into which you trace the material? Have we not the same reason to trace that ideal world into another ideal world, or new intelligent principle? But if we stop and go no farther; why go so far? Why not stop at the material world? How can we satisfy ourselves without going on *in infinitum*? And after all, what satisfaction is there in that infinite progression? Let us remember the story of the Indian philosopher and his elephant. It was never more applicable than to the present subject. . . . It were better, therefore, never to look beyond the present material world. . . . When you go one step beyond the mundane system, you only excite an inquisitive humor, which it is impossible ever to satisfy. . . . The first step, which we make, leads us on forever.³

The basic principle, "Every being has a cause," is not mentioned here explicitly. But it is clearly operating implicitly and controlling the reasoning, for if one did not suppose it, one would have no right to carry on the causal inquiry *in infinitum*. Either every being has a cause, or why demand it of any? Part of the effectiveness, however, of Hume's critiques on the ordinary reader may perhaps lie in this, that he so often leaves implicit the

full set of premises at work. At any rate, Bertrand Russell has brought all the premises clearly out into the open and has formulated the critique as cleanly and neatly as could be desired. The lineage of the argument is therefore clear in its main lines: from Hume through Mill to Russell in our own day.

From Russell, or perhaps independently of him, it has spread to a considerable number of contemporary agnostic thinkers influenced in one way or another by this tradition. Let me give a few recent examples from widely read and influential books. The first is from the widely used and in many ways highly competent textbook by John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, now in its second edition, several of whose chapters, notably those on “Matter and Life” and “Mind and Body,” I have often used myself for their lucid analysis and critical acumen. Thus I am picking out this book precisely because it is in many other respects such a good book and its author a respected analytic philosopher. In his chapter on God he puts forward the following as a succinct summation of the “traditional” cosmological argument for the existence of God:

The *cosmological argument* proceeds from the fact that the universe, or cosmos, exists. . . . Look around you at the universe, one might say—the millions of stars and galaxies, the vast array of living things, the panorama of human life. Some being must have produced all this—and who or what could have produced it but God? More succinctly stated, the argument says: Everything has a cause. If this is so, then the universe itself must have a cause. That cause is God. Therefore, God exists.⁴

The author’s critical comments are as clear and explicit as could be desired, rubbing the point in until no one could miss it, and demonstrably inspired by the Hume-Russell tradition we have been tracing:

Let us, however, assume that we can admit the question “Does the universe as a whole have a cause?” Now suppose we answer “God.” Then comes the inevitable next question: “But what caused God?” Many children ask this question, to the great embarrassment of their parents. But the question is perfectly legitimate: After all, we have just been told that everything has a cause, and if that is true, then God too must have a cause. And if God does *not* have a cause, then it is not true that everything has a cause.

It would seem, then, that the causal argument is not merely invalid but self-contradictory: the conclusion, which says that something (God) does not have

a cause, contradicts the premise, which says that everything does have a cause. If that premise is true, the conclusion cannot be true; and if the conclusion is true, the premise cannot be. Many people do not at once see this because they use the argument to get to God, and then, having arrived at where they want to go, they forget all about the argument. . . . But consistency requires us to think further: if the conclusion contradicts its own premise, we have the most damning indictment of any argument that we could possibly have: that it is self-contradictory. "But," one might object, "I don't mean that *everything* has a cause—I mean that everything *except* God has a cause." But why do we stop at just this point? If we stop somewhere, why not stop with the universe itself? At least that is something of which we have experience and some knowledge.⁵

He then goes on to quote the identical passage of Hume which we have reproduced above. Again it must be abundantly clear to the reader that if such is the cosmological argument it is patently invalid—so patently, in fact, that it should have aroused the suspicions of its attackers. For, despite the amazing amount of ambiguities and non sequiturs strewn throughout the long history of philosophy, it is rare that philosophers of any sophistication have proposed patently self-contradictory arguments, such as this one surely is. But let us first complete our survey.

Another even more widely used book by distinguished authors that has introduced thousands of students to philosophy presents the same argument and critique, but in a more confused form:

One of the oldest arguments amounts essentially to the assertion that nature . . . requires an explanation . . . Thus we must explain it by appealing to the concept of something supernatural. Nature could not have brought itself into being; it must have had some cause. Or the argument is sometimes stated in this manner: Any event whatever must have had some cause, it is a contradiction to say that anything brings itself into existence. But by the same reasoning, the cause is itself the effect of some previous cause. And so on back in the case of each preceding cause. Now this chain of causes must have had a beginning . . . There must consequently have been a first or ultimate cause, itself uncaused, responsible for the initiation of the series of events. This series of events is nature, and the first cause, God.⁶

The reader will note the unexplained shift in the course of the argument from the principle, "Every event has a cause," to "Every cause has a

cause,” which implicitly is another way of saying that every being has a cause.

The authors now make their critique:

The argument fails to give an adequate reason why, though every cause must allegedly have had a previous cause, the “first” cause is excepted from this rule. To say that the rule applies only to natural causes is simply a restatement of the same point; for the question still remains. Why may we assume that the supernatural requires no cause and is its own cause? The usual answer is that the supernatural is something incomprehensible—we can know that there must *be* such, but we cannot know *what* it is, we cannot know anything *about* it. The argument falls back on the presupposition of an unknowable reality with miraculous properties. . . . Difficulties of this kind indicate that an appeal to faith is sooner or later inevitable for supernaturalists who appeal to argument.⁷

The reader will note the main point on which this critique rests: the transition from “Every event has a cause” to “Every cause has a cause.” This can be justified only if either every cause is an event—a highly dubious proposition which no theistic philosopher (who is supposed to be proposing the argument) would admit—or if every being has a cause. This unexplained shift, however, is necessary if the traditional Hume-Russell coup de grâce is to be administered.

The same unexplained and unjustified shift from “Every event has a cause” to “Every being has a cause” is not infrequently found in other contemporary writers. Thus even such a sophisticated thinker as Ronald Hepburn falls into the same pattern of exposition and criticism:

The defender of the argument may reply: “All that we have to know is that *every event has a cause*. We do know that; and it makes no difference *what* events we are talking about nor how hard it is to conceive the cause which they require. And so the world requires God as its cause. The argument is perfectly sound.”⁸

After criticizing the obscurity in the principle “Every event has a cause,” he then proceeds with the traditional objection:

Suppose, however, that we allowed that the universe might in fact demand a cause. . . . Would this concession be enough to rid the Argument of its difficulties? Only if, for one thing, we could be sure that the being who caused the

universe to exist did not himself require a cause of a still higher order. If everything without exception demands a cause, then God must have *his* cause too. God, replies the Thomist, is the author of his own existence. But then, his critic can point out, here *is* an exception to the rule: not everything demands a cause, after all. And if this is so, how do I know that the *world* demands a cause, or everything in the world? Admit exceptions, and the Cosmological Argument at once loses its purchase.⁹

Another author, Elmer Sprague, tries to involve Saint Thomas Aquinas himself in the same trap. In his famous Second Way for proving the existence of God, Saint Thomas argues from the existence of a series of caused causes to an uncaused First Cause. In so doing he enunciates the principle, “No being can be a cause of itself.” Sprague seems to believe—to argue from his subsequent critique—that this can be transposed logically into “Every being has a cause.” He then proceeds with the traditional Hume-Russell critique we have seen before.¹⁰ The confusion is disastrous here. The proposition “No being can cause itself” is in no way reducible to “Every being has a cause,” since implicit in the former is the qualifying proviso “No being *which needs a cause* can be the cause of itself.” This obviously asserts nothing as to whether every being requires a cause or not, but only that every being that *does* require a cause must be caused by another. It is as though one were to maintain that “No man can be married to himself” logically implies “Every man is married”—an obvious non sequitur. Furthermore, Saint Thomas himself has explicitly rejected the “Every being has a cause” principle:

Now to be caused by another does not appertain to a being inasmuch as it is a being; otherwise every being would be caused by another, so that we should have to proceed to infinity in causes—an impossibility, as was shown in Book I of this work.¹¹

There is no need, I take it, to multiply indefinitely examples of the prevalence and tenacity of this tradition of interpretation and criticism of the cosmological argument.

We are here dealing with a clear-cut case of a tradition of antitheistic argument, which keeps perpetuating itself by family inheritance without renewal from outside and, as we shall see, without any effort to ascertain whether the antagonists at whom the salvos are regularly fired are still there any more.

In fact, this tradition has been so much taken for granted by Anglo-Saxon philosophers that we occasionally find it accepted without question even by theistic philosophers who are themselves critical of traditional proofs. Thus Professor H. D. Lewis, in his otherwise excellent book *Our Experience of God*, before laying out his own approach of a one-step insight into the exigency of the infinite in the finite, criticizes briefly the traditional formal arguments. He says of the First Cause argument: "If, for example, we appeal to the traditional 'first cause' argument, we invite the rejoinder that, on our premiss that everything must have a cause, the alleged 'first cause' must have a cause as well."¹²

The Blind Spot in the Tradition

Now let us examine this classic critique. Let it first be agreed without qualification that if one does admit the principle "Every being has a cause," then the refutation is inescapable and devastating. But the very ease of this refutation, if nothing else, should have aroused some suspicions in the minds of its users, one would have thought, as to whether their supposed opponents were actually using this principle. And it is in itself a highly suspicious fact that no one among the many in this Hume-Russell tradition whom I have read ever quotes any specific theistic philosopher who does make use of it. So constant is this pattern, in fact, that I am willing to wager that this family trait is found also in those I have not yet run across.

What are the facts? I submit that this long-entrenched tradition of anti-theistic argument is completely out of touch with the actual reality of the theistic tradition it is supposed to be attacking. And this is the case for the simple reason that no reputable theistic philosopher (understanding "reputable" in a very broad sense as intending to exclude primarily the popular apologist who is not a trained philosopher), at least since about the fourth century A.D., has actually proposed such a principle as "Every being has a cause" in the sense understood by the Hume-Russell tradition, that is, everything is caused by *another* being. Thomas Aquinas, in fact, certainly one of the leading representatives of the causal argument tradition, explicitly repudiates the principle, as we have seen; nor has any other scholastic philosopher ever used it. It would, in fact, make no sense for any theistic philosopher who knows what he is doing to subscribe to such

a principle. It goes directly counter to the whole aim and meaning of the enterprise of metaphysical causal explanation. In fact, I do not see how any philosopher of whatever persuasion, theistic or not, could propose any evidence for such a proposition, though he could, of course, make a postulatory assertion of it, or add some qualifier such as: every being in our experience has a cause.

In what follows I shall first examine what the causal principle is which actually functions in traditional cosmological or First Cause arguments for the existence of God, and how in general it functions. Then I shall take up the historical question of how the misunderstanding of it by the Hume-Russell tradition might have arisen.

The Causal Principle in Theistic Argument

The reason why no reputable theistic philosopher either has used or could possibly use the proposition "Every being has a cause," combined with a second classical principle, "Every efficient cause is distinct, other, than its effect," as a premise for arguing to God as First Cause is that the acceptance of such a principle exhibits a complete misunderstanding of the whole context, meaning, and purpose of causal inquiry in philosophical metaphysics (as distinct from the special restricted meaning and use of causality in modern scientific inquiry, where it is more or less equivalent to lawful predictability). In philosophical causal analysis, on which the cosmological argument is based, the general procedure is as follows: The context of inquiry is the search for the intelligibility or sufficient reason of the beings of our experience. This involves a prior commitment of the inquiring mind to the principle of the intelligibility of being, often formulated as the principle of sufficient reason: "Every being must have the sufficient reason for its existence somewhere in being, that is, either in itself or in another being (or set of beings)." This principle is indeed without exception. Just how one arrives at acceptance of or commitment to this fundamental principle underlying all explanatory inquiry of any sort is not our present concern.¹³ It should be noted, however, that since this exigency for intelligibility is a simple function of the inquiring mind at work, its meaning can be defined more precisely only in function of the particular relevant questions which the mind judges reasonable to raise in a particular horizon or context of inquiry.

Next, the inquiring mind applies this general exigency of intelligibility to some particular set of data, some being or set of beings, of its experience

to be examined. If it contends that it has sufficient reason in itself, end of inquiry. If it finds the latter positively lacking in intelligibility, irreparably and demonstrably incapable of possessing its own sufficient reason, of being self-explanatory, if taken by itself alone, then defective in sufficient reason (that is, not just, I do not happen to understand them, but I see that they *cannot* measure up to the exigency of intelligibility I reasonably bring to bear on them here) *if* taken by themselves alone—that is, as hypothetically self-sufficient or self-explanatory—then the inquiring mind concludes that they must have their sufficient reason, their objective ground of intelligibility, in some other being(s), which is *thereby* termed its “cause,” or that which is responsible for its actual existence, either totally or in some respect. The type of cause taken for granted here, unless otherwise specified is the primary type, the so-called efficient cause, that by which something is made to be or given being in whatever way it needs as non-self-sufficient being.¹⁴

The notion of *cause*, therefore, is not at all the same as that of *sufficient reason*. The latter simply means adequate ground of intelligibility, and applies to all being; it can be verified either in the being itself under inquiry—which is then termed “self-sufficient,” “self-explanatory,” or “self-accounting-for”—or in another being(s)—which is then termed its “cause.” The notion of cause is thus more restricted in meaning, as one of two possible modes of answer to the quest for sufficient reason or intelligibility. The question of a cause for some being arises only in a context of inquiry where the being in question turns out to be somehow *defective* in its internal intelligibility when taken by itself, *not self-sufficient* for some specified reason. Then alone does the search for an adequate cause, its sufficient reason in *another* being(s), arise at all and take on meaning.

It follows from all this that until some clearly evidenced deficiency in intelligibility is discovered in a being, it simply lacks meaning to ask, “What is its cause?” since the necessary premise for the meaningfulness of the causal question is lacking. Hence all causal principles of the form “Every X has a cause” must, to make sense, specify under the X some kind of being that is judged to be somehow defective in intelligibility by itself alone. Thus for Aristotle the causal principle would be, “Every being *which comes into existence or undergoes change* requires a cause.” In another metaphysical system where finitude is seen as more fundamental than change, as is the case for Thomas Aquinas, the principle could be broadened to “Every *finite, or composed, or participated*, being requires a cause.” Or one

could enunciate a purely formal all-inclusive principle such as, “Every *contingent* being requires a cause.” To avoid the logical complications of possible and necessary being implied in the strict conception of “contingent” as that which can be or not be, the opposite of “necessary,” I and many others (following Aquinas’s implicit practice) prefer the absolutely general and formal “Every being *which does not have its sufficient reason in itself* requires a cause.”

It follows, of course, that it literally makes no sense, within this tradition of the complementary meanings of “cause” and “sufficient reason” (where something that does not have its sufficient reason in itself must have it in another being or beings which is then called its “cause”), to ask why the world cannot be self-caused, if God is self-caused. For the very term “self-caused” would be a contradiction in terms. If “cause,” on the other hand, is taken to mean merely “sufficient reason,” then there is no difficulty in calling something “self-caused.” But the reason why the world is asserted to be not self-caused is precisely that it has been shown not to contain its own sufficient reason within itself. One can, of course, use any meaning of “cause” one wishes to. But one cannot mix two mutually exclusive meanings at once in the exposition of another’s argument and then maintain that the argument does not hold.

Accordingly, to enunciate a principle such as “Every being has a cause” would either be meaningless or would imply the prior judgment that every being in the universe is somehow defective in intelligibility, not self-sufficient. How any philosopher could arrive at the latter conclusion—since it could hardly be a self-evident principle—is to say the least obscure, if not in principle impossible. But it would be particularly unintelligible for a theistic philosopher to do so, since he or she would be eliminating ahead of time the very possibility of the cause, which is called existence of the being one is trying to prove, God as *the* self-sufficient being or First Cause. The whole point of the causal inquiry as applied to the argument for the existence of God is to pursue the search for intelligibility from the non-self-sufficient being from which it started, back through non-self-sufficient causes, to some ultimate self-sufficient cause, which is called “God,” in which alone the causal inquiry can come to an end, and without which the fundamental principle of sufficient reason itself would have to be abandoned. To have reached this point of the affirmation of a self-sufficient being and then to ask what is the cause of this being would simply make no sense, since in a self-sufficient being there is lacking by definition any basis for even raising the question of cause, though the

question of sufficient reason still applies since it allows of the answer “self-sufficient.”

We can only conclude, then, that the Hume-Russell tradition of anti-theistic argument, on this point at least, somehow got off to a bad start by completely misunderstanding and misrepresenting the very argument it was trying to refute, and that it has continued to repeat itself ever since, talking only to itself, and without ever bothering to inquire whether the supposed other party to the debate was still there at all, or had ever been there. In a word, it has become a tradition in the worst sense of the word, truly in a rut and apparently unaware of it.

Historical Origins of the “Every Being Has a Cause” Principle

How could such a tradition of misinterpretation have ever gotten started in the first place? Has anything like it ever been formulated, which could have given Hume the occasion for his critique? If we turn to ancient philosophy, we find that, although it cannot be found in any ancient metaphysicians, such as Plato and Aristotle, it does seem to have been accepted by some lesser thinkers. Thus Lactantius, a Christian writer of the early fourth century, whose philosophical ability is definitely below par, quotes approvingly Seneca as saying, “God made himself (*ipse se fecit*),” which would seem to presuppose that everything is made by something. Lactantius then goes on to make the following astonishing philosophical assertion in his own right: “Since it is impossible for anything that exists not to have at some time begun to exist, it follows that, when nothing else existed before Him, He [God] was procreated from himself before all things (*ex se ipso sit procreatus*).”¹⁵ It was for reasons such as these, among others, we might add, that Lactantius was never numbered among the Fathers of the Church. Saint Augustine firmly outlawed once and for all for succeeding Christian thought any such notion as God’s making himself and with it any principle such as “Every being has a cause” in the strong meaning of cause.¹⁶ Yet even among these ancient thinkers, to do them justice, there was none who held that every being is caused by *another* being, as Hume’s critique really demands.

The next time something like this principle occurs in the history of Western philosophy is with Descartes, Spinoza, and the rationalist school. In his Third Meditation, Descartes had spoken of God as in a sense self-caused (*causa sui*), related to himself somewhat like the relation of an efficient cause to its effect. Both Caterus in the First Objections and Arnauld

in the Fourth Objections take him sharply to task for this type of expression, insisting on the classical meaning of efficient cause as always distinct from its effect. Descartes makes two rather complicated defenses of his position and language, in which he at least apparently changes his terminology and the meaning of “cause” several times during his sinuous replies. Here we do find clearly enough stated at least twice the proposition that every being has a cause, or that it can be asked of every being what is its cause or reason for existing. Descartes insists that one be allowed to ask such questions even of God in the process of arguing to Him, otherwise one could never rise to the discovery of Him as self-originating First Cause.

But it seems to me self-evident that everything that exists springs either from a cause or from itself considered as a cause; for, since we understand not only what existence is, but also what negation of existence is, we cannot feign that anything exists *per se* as to which no reason can be given regarding why it exists rather than does not exist; hence there is no reason for not interpreting self-originated in the sense in which it implies causal power, that power, to wit, which passes all bounds . . . found in God alone.¹⁷

Moreover, the light of nature certainly tells us that nothing exists about which the question, why it exists, cannot be asked, whether we inquire for its efficient cause, or, if it does not possess one, demand why it does not have one. Hence, if I did not believe that anything could in some way be related to itself exactly as an efficient cause is related to its effect, so far should I be from concluding that any first cause existed, that, on the contrary, I should once more ask for the cause of that which had been called first, and so should never arrive at the first at all. But I frankly allow that something may exist in which there is such a great and inexhaustible power that it has needed no assistance in order to exist, and requires none for its preservation, and hence is in a certain *way* the cause of its own existence; such a cause I understand God to be.¹⁸

He then goes on to insist in the Reply to the Fourth Objections that we must be allowed to ask the universal question of efficient cause about God too; and it must be admitted that his words at least invite confusion:

We shall not be able to pursue this proof with accuracy if we do not grant our mind the liberty of asking for an efficient cause in every case, even in that of God; for with what right should we exclude God, before we have proved that

He exists? Hence in every single case we must inquire whether it is *derived from itself or from something else*; and indeed by this means the existence of God may be inferred.¹⁹

The confusion is clear. “It is derived from itself” does not make good sense. How can its own existence be derived from its own existence unless its own existence preceded itself? And again:

For how could those who have not as yet known God enquire into the efficient cause of other things, in order thus to arrive at the knowledge of God, unless they believed that it was possible to enquire for the efficient cause of everything whatsoever? And how could they make God, as being the first cause, the end of their investigation, if they thought that things must in all cases have a cause distinct from themselves?²⁰

But this is exactly what the modern antitheistic objection is declaring! Nonetheless, Descartes goes on to explain that he does not mean efficient cause in the strict sense of producing another, but rather something positive like efficient cause, whether you call it formal cause, sufficient reason, or what have you.²¹ It is clear that there is enough material in these sinuous answers of Descartes for an unsympathetic mind to pick up the principle “Every being has a cause.” But what is also clear is that he himself understands it as analogous, as shifting in meaning between efficient cause in the strict sense and the looser meaning of some positive sufficient reason, and that he certainly does *not* understand it as implying that every being is caused by another being than itself. In fact, he formally denies this. Hence one can certainly not legitimately object, as the Hume-Russell tradition does, that once one asks the question “What is the cause of God?” one will be obliged to go on to another and so on forever.²² Descartes may well be accused of an unfortunate confusion in terminology between “cause” and “sufficient reason,” but he certainly cannot be accused of a patent contradiction in logic.

The same blending of cause and sufficient reason occurs even more pronouncedly in Spinoza, where cause itself tends to be conceived on the model of the necessary relation of ideas flowing one from another. The notion of God as *causa sui* also persists in various modified forms down through much of the German idealist tradition. But there is no need for our purposes to explore further in detail this history, since the situations are basically analogous to the one we have just explored in Descartes and Spinoza.

We are now in a position to see more clearly what Hume and his successors have done. They have taken a somewhat confused or ambiguous statement of the principle of sufficient reason, "Every being has a cause, *or* sufficient reason, for its existence," from the rationalist tradition, where, understood as it was there, it would not be subject to the Humean critique of an endless regress. They have then reinterpreted it to mean *only* the strict classical sense of efficient cause as *other* than the effect it causes, which its proponents had actually repudiated; they next proceeded to demolish as contradictory the argument for God in which this newly interpreted principle was supposed to function as key premise. Thus the First Cause argument for the existence of God which the Hume-Russell tradition so devastatingly attacks is indeed an inviable metaphysical monster. But it is a monster of their own fabrication, not that of any reputable theistic philosopher. It is actually a kind of hybrid of both the traditional Scholastic and Cartesian rationalist traditions, which would make sense in neither and be repudiated by both.

Now it may be that Hume had some excuse for this in the ambiguity of Descartes' own terminology, and perhaps did not realize exactly what kind of hybrid he was constructing.

But it is much harder to excuse his successors in this tradition, with all the resources of historical scholarship and linguistic analysis at their disposal, for perpetuating this confusion. The very fact that no one in this tradition ever quotes a specific theistic philosopher as source for the key principle, "Every being has a cause," should by itself have aroused the suspicions of the present-day descendants that some further investigation was called for, but in fact never provided.

To sum up, the point I have tried to make is that we are here in the presence of a philosophical tradition that is truly in a self-repetitive rut, a tradition that has long since ceased to look outside of itself to check with reality and see whether the adversary it so triumphantly and effortlessly demolishes really exists at all. I maintain that no such other party in the supposed dialogue actually exists, or ever existed in either medieval or modern times, and I challenge anyone to produce a bona fide instance among professional or recognized philosophers who use it in a theistic argument. If this is not possible, as I feel certain is the case, then it would seem to be high time that those who still follow this particular tradition of antitheistic argument should have the grace and humility to acknowledge that their argument is dead, and let us get on with more substantive

problems with regard to philosophical argument for and against the existence of God.

The Substantive Question Remaining

Lest this article appear too negative, I would like to conclude by proposing what does seem to me to be one of the most profoundly substantive issues in the legitimacy of any attempt to construct a philosophical proof for the existence of God.

Let us suppose that for other good reasons the critics of the cosmological argument are right and that the argument is not conclusive. What then is the response to the question which the cosmological proof raised and was attempting to answer? This is the radical question of the adequate sufficient reason, the adequate intelligible grounding or explanation of the *actual existence* of the world of our experience, of the system of nature as a whole. I do not mean that one should start with the natural universe as a whole as an immediate datum of experience, which it is not, as Russell and other critics have well shown. One must start with some particular experienced beings as a datum. But once one draws them back through a series of causes into the system as a whole in the search for explanation, the question then inevitably arises: What about the *existence* of the interacting system as a whole (whether it is one or many unconnected systems does not matter)?

This is a question which those in the agnostic or antitheistic tradition simply refuse for the most part to raise, and all refuse to answer. Explanation for them consists in relating any particular item to be explained to other elements in the system, or by showing its place as a derivative of the system as a whole. But at this point the explanation stops. The question of the existence of the system itself as a whole is simply never asked. It is taken for granted as a sheer ultimate given about which no questions are legitimate. As Bertrand Russell has put it in his debate on the existence of God with Father Copleston: "I should say that the universe is just there, and that's all."²³

Merleau-Ponty and others in the phenomenological tradition maintain that, because the human knower is only a part of the whole, always presupposing the world as an indeterminate whole as the horizon of all his or her knowledge, and condemned by the knower's historical spatio-temporal mode of being to a limited relative perspective on the whole, one can never

raise questions—let alone answer them—about the whole as such, since that would presuppose an absolute viewpoint outside the whole, which is impossible for humans.²⁴

A small number of others in the agnostic tradition far more wise and sophisticated, it seems to me, are willing to concede that the question can be legitimately raised, and that it is a profound and significant one that can do us much good to ask. But it must remain *a* mystery with no possibility of explanation—thus, for example, Milton Munitz in his wise and serious book, *The Mystery of Existence*.²⁵

Here, it seems to me, is the truly decisive and fundamental question where two views of nature and range of human intelligence clash head on. Can or cannot the human intelligence legitimately raise the radical question about the very existence of the universe as a whole in which he lives? And if so, is there any legitimate schema or type of explanation which would render meaningful and possible an answer in the theistic sense? Personally, I believe that once one has taken full cognizance of the irreducibly polymorphic character of human consciousness and the unrestricted scope or illimitable horizon of its drive to know, then to attempt to limit the mind's ability to raise relevant questions to certain restricted types of explanation is to do violence to its nature. Hence not only can one not prevent someone from reasonably raising the question of the existence of the universe as a whole and its sufficient reason or ground, but to raise this question is the necessary fruition of the full conscious taking possession of one's intellectual dynamism in depth.

With regard to the possibility of a meaningful answer, I believe again that there is a legitimate schema of explanation which can be used, though by its nature it resists reduction to the rigorous cogency of any formal logical proof. This is a strictly metaphysical postulatory type of explanation, whose general form is: Given radical commitment to the total intelligibility of being implicit in the acceptance of my mind's unrestricted desire to know, and given some concrete empirical datum or set of data which can be shown not to contain the adequate sufficient reason for their given existence in themselves, there *must be* in reality some entity such that it can do the job, fulfill the explanatory role called for by the otherwise unsatisfiable exigency of the mind for intelligibility, in other words, be an adequate cause. It therefore must be and can be reasonably *postulated* both to exist and to possess all those—and only those—properties or attributes necessary for it to do its job. In a word, as Bernard Lonergan puts it: "If

being is intelligible, then God exists. But being is intelligible. Therefore God exists.”²⁶

Just how one carries out the enterprise of unveiling the radical question of the existence of the whole and working out a schema of explanation for answering it is itself, of course, a matter calling for the most careful analysis and open to a truly serious dialogue of radical counterquestioning. This clearly cannot be done here. But I have already indicated elsewhere the main lines of how I think it can be done.²⁷

The Problem of the Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas in Christian Neoplatonism

My purpose in this paper is to trace a chapter in the history of ideas within the broad stream of Neoplatonism as it passes into Christian thought. The theme is one that caused special difficulties to Christian thinkers as they tried to adapt the old wine of Neoplatonic metaphysics to the new wine-skins of Christian theism. My intention is not to focus in detail on just what each thinker involved held, as a matter primarily of historical scholarship. My interest will rather be focused primarily on the basic philosophical problem itself, and on tracing out the general *types* of solutions tried out by various key thinkers along the line from Plato to Saint Thomas. The problem is this: For Plato and all pre-Christian Platonists the world of ideas was “the really real”; hence, the multiplicity of the ideas and their mutual distinctions were also real, though in the mutual togetherness proper to all spiritual reality. Such multiplicity, however, was not admitted into the highest Principle, the supreme One, who by nature had to be absolutely simple to be absolutely one. But the Christian God, as personally knowing and loving all creatures and exercising providence over every individual, had to contain this world of archetypal ideas within his own mind, in the Logos. Yet the real being of God was also held to be infinite and simple; the only real multiplicity allowed within it was that of the relational distinction of the three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How would it be possible to put all these doctrines together without internal contradiction in a consistent doctrine of God? The story of the

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various efforts to meet the problem is a fascinating and illuminating study in the history of ideas. Let us retrace the principle moments in it.

Plato

For Plato himself it is clear that the world of ideas possesses a strong dose of reality. The breakthrough to discover the abiding presence of this transcendent dimension of reality, for the first time in the history of Western thought, must have been a powerful, almost intoxicating, experience for him, as though a veil had been pulled aside to reveal at last the splendor of the truly real, in comparison with which our changing world of sensible objects was only a shadowlike imperfect image. No modern neo-Kantian or analytic philosophy reinterpretation of the theory of ideas as merely conceptual or linguistic categories should be allowed to vitiate the strength of Plato's ontological commitment to the objective reality of ideas, however this be finally interpreted.¹ But when we come to the relation between the world of ideas and the mind as knowing them, clouds of ambiguity begin to thicken. *Where* are the ideas? What is their ontological "location" or ground? Do they constitute an independent dimension of reality on their own, whose autonomous light is then passively received by any mind knowing them? Or do they reside in some ultimate mind that supports them by always thinking about them?

With respect to the human mind it is clear that the world of ideas constitutes a realm that is ontologically quite independent of our minds. We do not just make them up; our knowledge is true because they are there. The matter is more obscure when we come to the demiurge of the *Timaeus*. No direct statement is made; but the images used suggest that the demiurge, in order to create an ordered cosmos, contemplates and copies an objective world of ideas that is already given even for him; it is the natural object of his contemplation, as it is for all the gods and unfallen souls who drive their chariots across the eternal heaven of ideas, but it is not something they think up or produce out of their own substance but which they gaze on as already given. Contemplation, the highest act of any Platonic mind, is a motionless reception, not a productive act.²

This leaves the ultimate status and ground of the world of ideas veiled in obscurity for Plato. The sparsely adumbrated doctrine of the One and the Good as the ultimate source for both ideas and minds does significantly complete the picture. But it is never made clear whether the Good

is a mind or something above it, whatever that might mean. There are indeed highly significant hints in the *Timaeus* and the *Sophist* that the whole world of ideas is part of a single great living unity. But the generation of the world of ideas by the Good, even if conceived as ultimate mind, which Plato never calls it, is quite compatible with the objective reality and the multiplicity of this world as the really real. In any case, the ultimate relation between the world of ideas and mind remains unfinished business in Plato, a legacy for his successors to unravel.

Plotinus

When we come to Plotinus—I will pass over the intermediate preparatory stages of Middle Platonism—a major resolution of the problem has been achieved, but with serious internal tensions still remaining. On the one hand, the ideas are now firmly located ontologically within the divine *Nous*; they no longer float in ambiguous ontological independence, but are eternally thought by this eternal mind as its connatural object. As a result the ideas themselves, though immutable, immaterial, and eternal, are alive with the very life of the divine Mind itself, each one a unique, self-thinking, spiritual perspective on the whole of reality.

On the other hand, there still remains a strong dose of the old Platonic realism of ideas, and this creates a tension between two somewhat conflicting perspectives on the status of the ideas in Plotinus—a tension that it does not seem to me that he completely resolves. This tension concerns the relation of priority between the *Nous* and the ideas: Is the *Nous* absolutely prior in nature (not, of course, in time) to the ideas, the realm of authentic being, as generative act to its product? Or do the ideas have a certain priority over the *Nous* as the true existence over the act that contemplates it? Or is there simultaneous reciprocal dependence, inherence, or even identity without any priority at all?

We would be tempted at first, viewing the problem from within the central dynamic perspective of the descending flow of emanation from the One, to assert that obviously the *Nous* (or Intellectual-Principle) has priority over the realm of being or ideas, as their generating source. As the *Nous*, emanating from the One, turns back toward the One in its first ontological “moment,” as an empty and formless ocean of potentiality, it is fecundated, so to speak, by its contemplation of the splendor of the One and bursts forth into producing the whole multiple world of ideas

in atemporal ordered sequence (corresponding to the inner order of the intelligible numbers, one, two, etc.).³ This dynamic perspective is certainly present in Plotinus, but surfaces only occasionally and briefly. I might add, speaking in my own name as philosopher, that in this direction lies, it seems to me, the only satisfactory metaphysical explanation of the relation between mind and ideas: the absolute priority of mind, as ultimate spiritual agent, over all ideas; existential act must always precede idea. This perspective gradually became dominant in Neoplatonism, both Christian and Islamic, after Plotinus, and in most modern thought. But it is still a minor chord in Plotinus himself.

There is another and more prominent perspective in Plotinus, however, which runs through the whole gamut of his works, both early and late; here the old Platonic priority of being over intelligence still stubbornly holds on and is never explicitly negated by Plotinus. This can be found especially in the ninth tractate of the fifth *Ennead*, "The Intellectual-Principle, the Ideas, and the Authentic Existence," a very early treatise, fifth in chronological order. The first point developed here is that the ideas cannot be outside the Intellectual-Principle, otherwise its truth would be insecure and its knowledge imperfect. The ideas must thus be part of the very self of the *Nous*, identical with its being as a single unitary life flowing through all the distinct parts. But Plotinus goes on to say more, giving a certain priority to the ideas over the *Nous* as thinking principle, so that they seem to constitute the very life of the *Nous* itself.

Being true knowledge, it actually is everything of which it takes cognizance; it carries as its own content the intellectual act and the intellectual object since it carries the Intellectual-Principle which actually is the primals and is always self-present and is in its nature an Act, . . . but always self-gathered, the very Being of the collective total, not an extern creating things by the act of knowing them. Not by its thinking God does God come to be; not by its thinking Movement does movement arise. Hence it is an error to call the Ideas intellections in the sense that, upon an intellectual act in this Principle, one such Idea or another is made to exist or exists. No: the object of this intellection must exist before the intellective act (must be the very content not the creation of the Intellectual-Principle). How else could this Principle come to know it?

If the Intellectual-Principle were envisaged as preceding Being, it would at once become a principle whose expression, its intellectual Act, achieves and engenders the Beings: but, since we are compelled to think of existence as preceding that which knows it, we can but think that the Beings are the actual

content of the knowing principle and that the very act, the intellection, is inherent to the Beings, as fire stands equipped from the beginning with fire-act; in this conception, the Beings contain the Intellectual-Principle as one and the same with themselves, as their own activity. But Being is itself an activity: there is one activity, then, in both or, rather, both are one thing.⁴

The above presents a significantly different perspective: here the inner being and act of the ideas seems to constitute the very act of the *Nous* itself, rather than the *Nous* giving them its own being by actively thinking them up. The older Platonic conception of mind, here faithfully reproduced, seems to be that mind as such, even the divine Mind, is by nature contemplative, not constitutive, of its object. This position, however, leaves open the difficulty we saw earlier in Plato, that is, what is the ultimate ground for the unified multiplicity of the world of ideas? It seems to be an exigency for intelligibility that only the active power of a unitary mind can ground both the multiple reality of the ideas and their mutual correlation into a single unified system. That is why the later, more dynamic perspective in Plotinus, that of the *Nous* as generative of the world of ideas, is more metaphysically satisfying, and is the one that actually dominated in the subsequent history of Neoplatonism.

Even though priority is occasionally given to *Nous* over the ideas, the strong realism of the ideas still remains undimmed in Plotinus. And it is this that forbids allowing the world of ideas to be in the One. Since the ideas are really real, true being, and really multiple or distinct, and the One as pure unity cannot tolerate the slightest shadow of multiplicity within itself, even that between mind and idea, the entire world of ideas or true being must be relegated to a lower level of divinity, the second hypostasis or *Nous*.⁵

The Early Christian Fathers

When the first philosophically minded and trained Christian thinkers took over the Neoplatonic philosophical framework to use in the intellectual explication of their faith, during the third and fourth centuries, they had to make two drastic changes in the matter which concerns us. First, the subordinationist hierarchy of divine hypostases in Plotinus had to be condensed into a single supreme divine principle, in which the three Persons within the divine nature were perfectly coequal in perfection of being,

distinguished only by internal relations of origin, not by differing levels of perfection. Thus the Word or Logos, the Second Person, corresponding analogously to Plotinus's *Nous*, was declared perfectly coequal with the Father (corresponding analogously to Plotinus's One) sharing the identical divine nature and perfection. Secondly, the single supreme God of the Christians was identically creator of the universe through knowledge and free act of love, and exercised personal providence over each and every individual creature. This required that the one divine Mind, the same for all three Persons but attributed by special aptness to the Word or Logos, contain the distinct knowledge of every creature as well as the universal archetypal ideal patterns guiding the creation of the world according to reason. The old Platonic and Neoplatonic world of ideas, enriched with the distinct knowledge of individuals, is now incorporated directly into the one supreme divine nature itself. Christian thinkers simply had to do this to do justice to their own revelation, and they had no hesitation, but rather took pride, in doing so.

The metaphysical repercussions, however, of making the above changes in Neoplatonic tradition were of seismic proportions, and did not seem to be recognized very clearly for some time in their full philosophical implications. Two basic Neoplatonic axioms have now been violated. First, knowing a distinct multiplicity of objects, even only as ideas, is no longer considered an inferior mode of being, weakening and compromising the radical purity of unqualified unity and simplicity in the One. To know multiplicity is no longer a weakness, but a positive perfection, part of the glory, of a One that is *personal*. To *know* multiplicity is not to *become* multiple oneself. Secondly, purely relational multiplicity even within the real being or nature of the One is no longer a compromise or destruction of its unity, but an enrichment. The highest form of unity is now not aloneness but communion of Persons with one mind and will. We are not concerned here with this second principle, relational multiplicity within the nature of the One. Our concern is limited to the status of the world of ideas within the divine Mind.

It was one thing for Christian thinkers to *assert* that the world of ideas must be within the divine Mind as Logos, in order that God may personally know and love his creatures. But it is another thing to come to grips successfully with the metaphysical problems involved in thus adapting the Neoplatonic doctrine of the world of ideas. In particular, what about the strong realism of ideas as true being, the really real, which was so deeply ingrained in the whole Platonic tradition, no less, in fact even more, in

Plotinus than in Plato himself? If the ideas remain, as always in this tradition, true and real being, they must also be really multiple. Does this not introduce an immense multiplicity of real beings, an immense real pluralism, within the very being of God himself, thus negating his infinite simplicity? In orthodox Christian doctrine, as it was gradually worked out, the only distinct realities allowed in God were relations, and the only real relations allowed were relations of origin resulting in the three Persons. But if all the divine ideas are also authentic, hence, real being, and at the same time distinct from each other in the intelligible (real) order, then there is not only a multiplicity of distinct real beings within God himself but a still greater multiplicity of real relations between them. For the relations between ideas are clearly distinctly intelligible, and for every traditional Platonist whatever is intelligible is also real.⁶

It is not clear to me that the Greek Fathers ever came to grips explicitly with this metaphysical problem of the reality of the divine ideas in God, aside from asserting that God knew them all with a single act of knowledge, which Plotinus would also admit. (I would be very happy to receive any information from my colleagues on this point, since patristics is not my field and I have not had the time in preparing this paper to do extensive study on this point.) My general impression is that we will have to wait until a later period to find explicit metaphysical discussion on this point.

Let us turn briefly to Saint Augustine in the West, as a prime example, it seems to me, of avoiding the issue. He holds simultaneously two metaphysical doctrines that I do not see that he has brought together in a consistent whole. On the one hand, one of his central doctrines, learned, as he tells us, from the Platonists, is that of divine exemplarism, namely, that the divine Mind contains the ideal exemplars, the *rationes aeternae*, of all created things, according to which he creates them by willing them to be, to be *expressed*, outside of himself as real creatures, as real *essentiae*.⁷ It should be noted along the way that Augustine is careful not to call the divine ideas *essentiae aeternae*, the eternal essences of things, but only *rationes aeternae*—eternal “reasons” or exemplary ideas, models. Since the concrete term *ens*, *entia* did not yet exist in Latin in Augustine’s time—it was introduced deliberately by Boethius centuries later—*essentia* was the standard noun derivative from the verb *esse* used in Augustine’s time for referring to existential being.⁸ Hence, on the one hand, one might be led to believe that these *rationes aeternae* were not considered by Augustine to be a realm of true being, in God, since the entire universe of real being

was created in time freely, not from all eternity, as these *rationes* necessarily existed in the mind of God.

On the other hand, when Augustine comes to an explicit discussion and definition of what it means to be—to be a being—his criterion of true being is quite unambiguously the old Platonic one of immutability; to *be* is to be *immutable*, to be identically and immutably *what* one is. His texts could hardly be more forceful:

There is only one immutable substance or essence, which is God, to which being itself (*ipsum esse*), from which essence draws its name, belongs supremely and in all truth. For that which changes does not keep its very being, and that which is capable of changing, even if it does not change, is capable of not being what it was. There only remains, therefore, that which not only does not change but is even absolutely incapable of changing which we can truthfully and honestly speak of as a being.⁹

Being (*esse*) is the name for immutability (*incommutabilitatis*). For all that changes ceases to be what it was and begins to be what it was not. True being, authentic being, genuine being is not possessed save by that which does not change.¹⁰

Being (*esse*) refers to that which abides. Hence that which is said to be in the supreme and maximal way is so called because of its perdurance in itself.¹¹

All change makes not to be what once was; therefore he truly is who is without change.¹²

The difficulty here for a Christian thinker is that this criterion for true being is verified perfectly by the divine ideas, as well as by God himself in his own being. The ideas in God are indeed eternal and immutable, as the ideal patterns for all creatures and the ground for all truth, which by its nature must be immutable. Since they perfectly verify the criterion, they should indeed be true being, real being for Augustine, just as they were for Plato and Plotinus, from whom the doctrine of divine ideas was directly inherited. Yet strangely enough, Augustine never quite seems to draw this conclusion and speak explicitly of the divine ideas as real being in themselves. He just seems to drop the point, to pull back into discreet silence just before he gets into metaphysical trouble. It is, however, common Augustinian doctrine that things are present more truly and nobly in the divine ideas of them than in their mutable, imperfect, created existence. Perhaps he did not see clearly the difficulty of the ideas as real multiplicity

in God, as did Plotinus; or perhaps he did see it, but did not know quite what to do with it, and just quietly let it drop. At any rate, he gives us no clear philosophical principles by which to solve it.¹³

John Scottus Eriugena

Let us now skip to a later Christian Neoplatonist, the early medieval thinker John Scotus Eriugena, whose thought has the advantage for our purposes of bringing together both the Augustinian and the Dionysian traditions. Its special interest lies in that the problems that remained latent and untreated by Saint Augustine now come out into the open with striking sharpness in this daring but by no means always consistent thinker.

The point that concerns us is the ontological status of the second division of nature in the vast cosmic schema of John Scotus' *De Divisione Naturae*, namely, *natura creata et creans*. This comprises the divine exemplary ideas or, as he calls them, the "primordial causes," which are the "first creation" of God, coeternal with the divine Word, but always dependent on the Word, in whom they subsist. They are created but also creating in their turn, charged with the power to unfold and produce the whole material cosmos spread out in space and time.¹⁴

The first point to notice is the strong Platonic realism of this realm of creative ideas. This is the realm of true being below God (who, for John Scotus, is the superessential Source above being itself).¹⁵ It is in this ideal realm that all creatures, especially the sensible world of creation, have their true being, perfect and immutable; they are more real, they more truly exist, in these eternal idea-causes than in themselves as the explicated effects or emanations of these causes, for the latter are not merely abstract ideas or static models but causal forces charged with creative power of their own, though deriving, of course, from their higher Principle. Thus each one of us exists more truly in the eternal idea of man than in our own temporally spread out existence in this lower material world. We have here one of the strongest statements of what is to be a favorite theme of Christian Neoplatonists all through the Middle Ages, at least in the pre-Scholastic period.¹⁶

The realism of these primordial causes is also borne out by the assertion that they have been "made," "formed," "created" by God as the first level of creation—a stronger term than any previous Christian thinker had used to refer to the divine ideas, though, to do him justice, he sometimes warns

that “created” here is not used in as strong and proper a meaning as its ordinary sense as applied to the second creation, that of the present contingent world. These primordial causes are produced *by* the Father *in* the Word from all eternity, in whom they subsist; yet as made (produced) they deserve to be called created. But what is created by God and which, itself, has causal power must certainly be real, and because immutable, also eternal, and spiritual, that is, authentic being, of which the changing world of bodies is but a shadowy image or participation. No statements of Augustine about the being of this realm of divine ideas are nearly as strong and clear as those found in John Scotus. It looks as though the Neoplatonic world of true being in the *Nous* has reappeared with new vigor and splendor.

It is a little surprising, therefore, to discover that, when Eriugena comes to speak of the mode of being of these primordial causes in the Word, with respect to their real multiplicity and distinction, he asserts in the strongest possible terms that in the divine Word they are absolutely “simple, one, unseparated,” perfectly identical with the Word’s own being, and “indistinguishable, without differentiae,” until they unfold in their actual effects in the space-time sensible world.¹⁷ To illustrate how they subsist in simple unity in the Word, he uses the example of how all numbers are present in the monad before division and how all lines are present in the point that is the center of a circle, with no distinction until they begin to unfold from the center.

Here I have the impression that Eriugena is being a better Christian than a Neoplatonist. I do not see how he can consistently hold both the real being and plurality of the primordial causes and also their perfect simplicity, unity, and identity with the Word as subsisting in it. Plotinus in fact holds the exact opposite, and would object as follows: The way that all numbers are in the number one and all lines in the point at the center of the circle is indeed the way that all things are precontained in the highest principle, the One, who is “the potentiality of all things” (*dynamis pantōn*) without being any of them. But this is not the way the ideas, the realm of true being, are in the second hypostasis, the *Nous*. There they are indeed held together in the unity of a single undivided spiritual life of intelligence; but this unity is a complex unity, not a simple one; it includes all the distinct intelligibilities of each Idea-Being as intelligibly distinct (though not separated or divided), as well as the distinction between the *Nous* as subject and the realm of being as intelligible object. It is precisely because

of this multiplicity that the world of ideas can have no place in the perfect, simple unity of the One, but only in a lower, less unified hypostasis.¹⁸

But there seems to be no trace in Eriugena of these reservations about the perfect unity and simplicity of the primordial causes in the Word. It is not clear how he can have it both ways, though if he is to remain both a good Christian and a good Neoplatonist he must try. Here we have the latent tension between the conflicting demands of the two traditions coming sharply to a head, since Eriugena pushes each one all the way to the limit. It is a remarkable case of the coincidence of opposites. If one looks at this apparent impasse as a speculative philosopher, there seems to be only one possible way in which one could hold onto both sides of the opposition without contradiction, although this “solution” brings its own new train of problems with it. Suppose that one were to hold that true being, the very being of the primordial causes, is *nothing else but* their being thought by God. Their truth is identical with their being. In this case since the *act* of knowing or thinking them is one single simple act, and they have *no other being* save their being thought, it could be said that their being, as identical with the act of thinking in the Word and never really emanating out from it to possess their own distinct being—until, of course, they are unfolded in the material cosmos—is really one single simple being identical with the Word.

In fact, it seems that this is precisely what Eriugena himself has followed, at least in certain of his strong formulations, such as:

For the understanding of all things in God is the essence of all things . . . all things are precisely because they are foreknown. For the essence of all things is nothing but the knowledge of all things in the Divine Wisdom. For in Him we live and move and have our being. For, as St. Dionysius says, the knowledge of the things that are is the things that are.¹⁹

For the understanding of things is what things really are, in the words of St.

Dionysius: “The knowledge of things that are is the things that are.”²⁰

It is true that Eriugena does qualify this identity here and elsewhere by calling the divine knowledge the cause of the things that are, so that cause and effect would seem to be distinguished. But if this distinction is pushed too far, hardened into the strong Aristotelian real distinction between cause and effect—and I think this is also true in its own mitigated way in Neoplatonism—then his position on the unity, simplicity, and identity of the primordial causes in the Word will collapse. Only in the relation between thought and its self-generated ideas can there be a real identity of

being between cause and effect, *granted* that the ideas have no being of their own.

I have two remarks to make about this doctrine of the identity of thought and being in Eriugena. First, if this is the case, it is now easy to understand how all creatures can be more truly in God, that is, in his knowledge, than in themselves, since it is this knowledge that in fact constitutes their true and perfect being. Another daring doctrine of Eriugena also becomes clear: in a sense, man himself is the creator of the material world, because he holds it together in unity in his own mind, as participating in the divine wisdom, and the material world exists more truly and perfectly even in man's mind than in itself. Again true being is identical with being known. We are here on the edge, if not over the edge, of something like the Hegelian mode of idealism, as has often been pointed out. We will consider the philosophical difficulties of this position later.

Secondly, it seems to me that here Eriugena has gone farther than Plotinus and classic Neoplatonism itself, and in a sense dramatically reversed the old Platonic realism, which on the other hand he seems to be strongly asserting and certainly wishes to assert. For in the Plotinian *Nous*, or world of true being, as we have seen, even though the ideas are held together in the unity of a single unified spiritual life, the act of divine intelligence, still this life, this unity of the world of being and knowing, is a multiplex unity, an intelligible (hence, real) diversity in unity and unity in diversity. The ideas truly emanate from the *Nous*, while remaining within it, to the extent that they are distinguished as subject and object; also the ideas truly have being within them, so much so that it is almost equally legitimate to say that the *Nous* itself is constituted in being by its union with the ideas as to say that the ideas are constituted in being by the *Nous*—there is a kind of reciprocal priority between them; a strong dosage of the old Platonic realism of ideas as in themselves true being still remains. Nothing like this can be found in Eriugena. In no way can it be said that the Word for him is constituted by the ideas it eternally thinks. The relation of dependence is strictly one-way, asymmetrical. His solution is Christian; can it still be called authentically Neoplatonic? I doubt it.

Let us now turn briefly to some of the purely metaphysical difficulties inherent in the Neoplatonic side of Eriugena's doctrine of the divine ideas as true being, with the result that we, like all creatures, exist more truly in our primordial idea-causes in God than in our own "explicated" temporal existence in ourselves—the third division of nature, that which is created but does not create. If this position is taken literally and in full seriousness,

then the problem arises, What is the point of this unfolding of our true being, already present from all eternity in God, into our present lesser mode of existence? What is the point of our existential struggle for salvation in human history in a lesser mode of being when we are already perfect in our truest being in God? The whole value of human history, including that of the Incarnation and temporal life of Christ himself, seems to become so secondary and “accidental,” as he puts it, that it becomes disturbingly ambiguous, if not tinged with unreality. His only answer seems to be the classic Neoplatonic one, a purely impersonal kind of metaphysical law of emanation—that the emanation must go on to its furthest multiplicity, that the Craftsman of the universe would not have shown forth the fullness of his power unless he had made all that could be made and unfolded all the oppositions between creatures and not just their harmonies. It should be remembered that in the second division of nature, the primordial causes, there are no oppositions or *differentiae* between the various genera and species; all is perfect togetherness.

This is a typical Neoplatonic theme or axiom of emanation, that the great chain of being must unfold all the way to the limit of its possibilities, by an inherent necessity of the self-diffusiveness of the Good. But such a view of the value and meaning of the contingent world as only an inferior ontological state of the *same* world at a higher level is hardly compatible with the inspiration of Christian personalism, where the supreme locus of value is the existential dimension of freely given personal love, moral nobility, and so on. The subject of the salvific redemption of Christ and the final beatific vision in the heavenly Jerusalem is not the eternally perfect, immutable idea of man, but the unique contingent individual John Smith who has worked out his salvation freely with the help of God on the stage of human history. In a word, there is a profound metaphysical, epistemological, and religious ambiguity in the Neoplatonic conception of the relation of the ideas to true being, not indeed in the presence of exemplary ideas of all things in God, but in their ontological evaluation, namely, that the true being of anything is found more fully, as true being, in its idea state in the mind of God than in itself. The classic Neoplatonic worldview of reality is not ultimately a personalism. The tension, if not contradiction, between this metaphysical view of reality and that implicit in any authentic Christian personalism seems to me to be profound and irreconcilable; it remains one of the central unsolved problems haunting Christian Neoplatonists—also, I might add, Islamic and Sufi Neoplatonists—throughout the pre-Scholastic Middle Ages. To sum it up, as this problem surfaces in

John Scotus Eriugena, I do not think he can hold, if he is to be a consistent and authentically Christian thinker, *both* that the primordial causes are absolutely simple and one in the Word, which a Christian must hold, *and* that the true being of all creatures resides in these divine ideas, rather than in their own contingent being in history, which a traditional Neoplatonist should hold. One of these two positions will have to give way if a consistent Christian metaphysics is to develop. But for this we have to look beyond the daring and seminal, but not always consistent, brilliance of John Scotus Eriugena.

In thus casting doubts on the metaphysical consistency and Christian assimilability of the cherished Neoplatonic theme that our true being is found in, consists in, the eternal idea of ourselves in the mind of God, I do not wish to deny the power and fruitfulness of the theme as it functioned—understood somewhat loosely, without pressing its metaphysical implications too rigorously—as a guide for spiritual development in the rich flowering of Christian spirituality during the Middle Ages. The operative concept here is that we understand our true self and come to realize it by turning toward and striving to fulfill the ideal model or exemplar of our fulfilled selves that God holds eternally to his mind and draws us toward by the magnetism of his goodness. Our true selves are indeed *seen* in God's ideas of us, and this vision is pregnant with the magnetic drawing power of the Good. But this does not require the further metaphysical commitment that our true being, our true selves, literally is, consists in, the divine idea of us. But it took a long time for these underlying metaphysical issues to be worked out explicitly in medieval Christian thought.

The School of Chartres

Let us now move several centuries down the line and take a brief look at another Christian Neoplatonist treatment of the same problem. This is the famous School of Chartres, known for its exaggerated Platonic realism of ideas.²¹ Its main themes are really a revival of John Scotus Eriugena with some original variations. The themes we are interested in are the realism of the divine ideas and their ontological status in the mind of God. Again we find almost the identical position of Eriugena. The true being of creatures is found in the divine ideas, which Thierry of Chartres, perhaps the most daring of the school, calls *formae natae*. These are found in their pure state in the mind of God, and become imprisoned and diminished by union with matter. As Clarembald of Arras tells us, the true being

of anything comes from its form: *omne esse ex forma est . . . quoniam forma perfectio rei et integritas est*.²² But all these forms as in God become a single simple form; God is the *forma essendi* of all forms and through them of all things.²³ But as they exist in God these exemplary forms are not yet explicated or unfolded as they are in the created world. Just as all numbers are already precontained in the simple unity of the monad or number one, so all forms are *complicatae* (enfolded as the opposite of unfolded) in the unity of one form in God. As Thierry puts it in a striking image, in God all forms fall back into the one: “The forms of all things, considered in the divine mind, are in a certain way one form, collapsed in some inexplicable way into the simplicity of the divine form.”²⁴ And thus “every form without matter is God himself.”²⁵

Clarembald of Arras explains further how the many forms are enfolded without real plurality in the one:

Every multitude lies hidden in the simplicity of unity, and when in the serial process of numeration a second is numbered after the one and a third after the second, then finally a certain form of plurality flowing from unity is recognized, and so without otherness there can be no plurality.²⁶

Here again, it seems to me, we run into the same unresolved tension as we found in Eriugena. It is indeed an authentically Christian metaphysical doctrine that all ideas are identical in being with the one perfectly simple being of the divine Mind. But I submit that this is not an authentically Neoplatonic doctrine; the ideas in the divine *Nous* for all classic Neoplatonists are already unfolded in their distinct intelligible multiplicity and hence in their plurality of being, thus forming the system of true being as integrated plurality—a plurality, however, without spatial or temporal separation, held together in the unity-multiplicity whole of a single spiritual life. (It is indeed true—this was objected to me in the discussion of the paper—that the ideas, like all things, are in a sense in the One, as the “power of all things” [*dynamis pantōn*]. But this is in a mode of supereminent simplicity, as in the power of the cause from which all else emanates, not in the mode of distinct intelligibility or of true being as in the *Nous*. The realm of being is below the pure unity of the One.) And if the thinkers of the School of Chartres insist that these divine ideas or native forms, though simple and one in God, are nonetheless the true being of all things, then we have a metaphysical impasse. *Either* this is a metaphysical contradiction or incoherence, *or* true being is nothing but its being thought, has no being of its own but only that of the act that thinks it. This seems to

me the conversion of the Neoplatonic realism into a latent idealism that is quite foreign to the original inspiration of the doctrine, and, I believe, to the explicit intentions of the Christian Neoplatonist thinkers themselves. Which side of the dilemma did they actually opt for? I have the impression that they were just not that clearly aware of the metaphysical implications of their thought and made no clear option, but remained oscillating ambiguously somewhere in the middle, unwilling to give up either end of the opposition.

But to be fair to them, the blame is not entirely theirs. They are trying to cope with the rich but enigmatic heritage of the Pseudo-Dionysius, who in his turn has tried to impose a new dialectic of the unmanifest-manifest divinity on the old Neoplatonic doctrine of the emanation of the world of ideas and the *Nous* from the One, but without making it that clear that some significantly new metaphysical laws have been introduced. Although something similar to the unmanifest-manifest dialectic can certainly be found in classical Neoplatonism, still the particular way in which Pseudo-Dionysius interprets it to hold onto the ontological simplicity of God—in terms of the divine “energies” which are both divine, God as *manifested*, and yet somehow multiple—seems to me to have a strong dose of Asian as well as Neoplatonic roots, unless one considers it an original creative Christian adaptation of Neoplatonism. I cannot go into this complicated but intriguing problem here. The Dionysian doctrine has remarkable affinities with the Hindu notion of the *shakti*, or divine power, of the “manifest” Brahman at work in the world. It was given central prominence later in the Eastern Orthodox theology of Gregory Palamas, but was rejected by Western Scholastic theologians. Like the doctrine of multiple divine ideas, it is filled with metaphysical tensions of its own.

Thirteenth-Century Scholasticism

We now come to a decisive new chapter in the history of our problem, one that finally provides a coherent metaphysical resolution to the almost one thousand years of tension within Christian Neoplatonism. This solution emerges gradually during the twelfth century, due to the struggle over the reality of universals, and finally comes to a head in thirteenth-century Scholasticism. Here the technical precision demanded of professors trained in Aristotelian logic and functioning in a professional academic community could no longer be satisfied with inspiring but metaphysically

fuzzy pantheistic-sounding formulas that at the same time repudiated pantheism, or with the simple assertion of unexplicated paradoxes held together by metaphors such as “all forms fall back into the simplicity of the one divine form.” The crucial decision is finally made: the Platonic realism of ideas must once and for all be given up.

There seems to have been a fairly wide consensus on this point, though, as we shall see, not universal. It was not only the Aristotelian current of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas that sponsored it: leading Augustinians such as Saint Bonaventure also agreed. In fact the latter provides us with an admirably succinct summary of the basic position:

God knows things through their eternal “reasons” (*rationes aeternae*) . . . But these eternal intelligibilities are not the true essences and quiddities of things, since they are not other than the Creator, whereas creature and Creator necessarily have different essences. And therefore it is necessary that they be exemplary forms and hence *similitudines representativae* of things themselves. Consequently these are intelligibilities whereby things that are made known (*rationes cognoscendi*), because knowledge, precisely as knowledge, signifies assimilation and expression between knower and known. And therefore we must assert, as the holy doctors say and reason shows, that God knows things through their similitudes.²⁷

The die is cast. The divine ideas are no longer the very forms, the true being, of creatures, but their intentional similitudes, whose only being is that of the one divine act of knowing. (It is quite true—as was objected in the discussion—that the divine ideas in Bonaventure seem to have a greater ontological density and dynamism than in Saint Thomas. But this remains the *creative* dynamism of the Word itself and is not the true being of creatures as for John Scotus. The very next question after the above quotation, whether there is any real multiplicity in the divine ideas, makes this clear beyond the shadow of a doubt. Hence, the suggestion made that he qualifies his position in the next paragraph is entirely without textual foundation.) But the firmest and clearest grounding for this common position is provided by Thomas Aquinas, with his new metaphysics of the composition of essence and act of existence (*esse*) in creatures and the location of the real perfection of beings no longer on the side of form but on the act of existence of which form is limiting principle.²⁸ Thus creatures have no true being until God as creative cause gives them their own intrinsic act of existence, which is not their intelligible essence but a distinct act by which form itself comes to be as a determinant structure of a real being.

As creatures are precontained in the divine ideas, they simply do not yet have this act of their own intrinsic *esse*, hence are not yet properly beings at all, let alone the really real. Their “subjective” being is identified entirely with the being of the simple act of divine intelligence which “thinks them up” (*adinvenire* is the word Saint Thomas carefully picks out, which means to invent or think up, not discover, which would be *invenire*) as possible limited modes of participation in his own infinite act of *esse subsistens*.²⁹ Thus their entire being is their *being-thought-about* by God, in a single simple act without any plurality of real being, though there is a clear plurality and distinction on the level of the objective intelligible content thought about by this one act. In a word, in the new technical terminology, the divine ideas are now only the “signifying signs of things” (*intentiones rerum*), not things themselves; their being is *esse intentionale* not *esse naturale* or *reale*.³⁰ This crucial distinction between *esse intentionale* and *esse naturale*, in terms of which alone the doctrine makes sense, is the one piece that has been conspicuously missing from the entire Platonic tradition, and for good reasons. To have admitted it would have blown up classical Platonism from within, or at least forced such a profound adaptation as to involve almost a change of essence. The term itself is an inheritance neither of the Platonic nor even the Aristotelian tradition, but from Arabic sources.

This single stroke of distinguishing the subjective being of ideas, which is nothing but the act of the mind that thinks them, from their objective content, their intentional meaning and reference, which can be multiple and distinct, opened the way at last to a metaphysically coherent assimilation of the whole Eriugenian doctrine of the presence of the divine ideas in the Word in a single, simple act prior to any plurality. The latter was indeed a brilliant insight of Christian Neoplatonism, but one that could not make sense unless the doctrine that accompanied it in Eriugena—that of the ideas as true being in themselves—was jettisoned. The divorce was painful, but inevitable. But this move also entailed the dropping of another cherished theme of classical Neoplatonism, namely, that the passage from the divine ideas, or realm of true being, to their unfolded exemplifications in the contingent world of matter is a passage to a lower mode of being, a degradation or diminution in being. Creation now becomes, on the contrary, a positive expansion from the merely mental being of the world of divine ideas to a new dimension of true being “outside” the divine Mind (*extra causas*), as an enrichment of the universe through a gracious free sharing of its own real perfection; for this real perfection is always in the

line of actual *esse*, and this was not yet accomplished in the realm of the divine ideas by themselves.

The same move also forced, if not the total giving up, at least the drastic toning down and reinterpretation of another closely linked theme long-cherished by Christian Neoplatonists in the pre-Scholastic period following the lead of Augustine himself.³¹ This is the notion that all creatures exist in a higher, more perfect state in the exemplary idea of each of them in the mind of God than in their own created being—especially so, but not exclusively, in the case of material beings. This theme still keeps recurring in the spiritual writings of Christian Neoplatonists, used as a potent motivation and intellectual model for spiritual growth.³² But its literal metaphysical force is now toned down.

Clearly Thomas Aquinas cannot hold this as a metaphysical doctrine—and not even Bonaventure, if he is to remain consistent with his text quoted above. For if, as I am present in the mind of God, I do not yet possess any slightest trace of my own intrinsic act of *esse*, in proportion to which alone is measured all my real participation in the perfection of God, then it cannot be literally asserted that I *exist*, have my true being, in a higher and more perfect state in God's idea of me than in my own contingent created existence in myself. It is true that my *intelligibility*, the *intelligible content* of the divine idea of me, exists in a higher, more perfect way in God than in me; but this is still not my true being, my *esse*.

Saint Thomas is quite aware that he is laying aside a long and venerable Augustinian tradition. But as is his wont in so doing, he never directly contradicts it, but reinterprets it to draw the most he can out of it without compromising his own metaphysical integrity.³³ Thus in the present case he is quite willing to admit that there is a certain fulfillment for a material being to exist, as known, in a spiritual intelligence, a fortiori in God's, since in being thus known the material mode of existence is transposed into a spiritual one, that of intentional existence, which is identical with the spiritual act of the mind knowing it. But this fulfillment can exist only if the material being already exists in its own material being and is *also* known in a spiritual mode. The real being of the material thing does not *consist* in its being known and the latter state cannot be substituted for the former with the full value retained. It does remain true, however, that the perfection of our real being is *represented*, held before us by the divine idea as an ideal goal, a final cause, drawing towards its actual realization through the drawing power of the Good reflected in it. It functions thus as a powerful *motivation* for spiritual growth toward the fulfillment of our

true being to-be-realized; but it is not this true being already existing in the mind of God. For if the latter were literally the case, why bother with working out on an inferior level the same perfection already given on a higher level? This was the enigma haunting, as we saw, Eriugena's emanation from the second to the third division of nature—a problem to which he gave no recognizably Christian solution.

All did not agree, however, with this deontologizing of the divine ideas. Henry of Ghent, teaching in Paris at the end of the thirteenth century, and drawing his inspiration both from Avicenna and Neoplatonism, complains that the more “current theological opinion” has gone too far in rejecting the doctrine of Eriugena and reducing the divine ideas to nothing but understood “modes of imitability of the divine essence (*rationes imitabilitatis*).” To this he opposes “the position excellently expressed by Avicenna in his *Metaphysics*, according to which the ideas signify the very essences of things.”³⁴ Expounding this position elsewhere he distinguished between two aspects of the ideas: (1) “the essences of things in the divine knowledge as objects known . . . which are really other (*secundum rem aliae*) than the divine nature”; and (2) “the *rationes* by which these are known, which are really identical with the divine nature.”³⁵ To explain this he introduces his own technical terms of a distinction between an idea and its *ideatum* or object, and a distinction between the being of essence and the being of existence (*esse essentiae* and *esse existientiae*):

Since therefore the ideas in God exercise causality in every way over the things of which they are the forms, by constituting them in both their *esse essentiae* and their *esse existientiae*, and this according to the mode of the exemplary formal cause, therefore the relation of the divine idea to its *ideata* . . . is according to the first genus of relation, which is that between the producer and its product . . . so that it follows from the divine perfection that from the ideal *ratio* in God, the first essence of the creature flows forth in its *esse essentiae*, and secondly, through the mediation of the divine will, this same essence flows forth in its *esse existientiae*.³⁶

But the introduction into Christian thought of this Avicennian attempt to salvage Neoplatonism in a creationist universe, by means of a world of possible essences which, as someone put it, “stands up stiff with reality” (the reality proper to essence in itself, distinct both from the idea that thinks it up and its later mode of created actual existence), did not find hospitable acceptance among the thirteenth-century and especially later Christian theologians. The ghost of John Scotus Eriugena was no longer

welcome at the banquet of Christian theology, although the overtones of the doctrine do linger on in Duns Scotus and down through Descartes, Spinoza, and the early rationalism of modern philosophy.

Fourteenth-Century Nominalism

We cannot conclude our story, however, without a brief word on the final denouement in medieval times. The thirteenth century gave birth to a careful balance between a firm maintaining of the presence and role of the divine ideas in God and a firm rejection of their identification with the true real being of creatures. The pendulum now swings all the way to the opposite extreme. The deontologizing of the divine ideas is pursued so relentlessly that the divine ideas themselves, even in their *esse intentionale*, finally disappear entirely. This is the work of William of Ockham and his nominalist followers. His sledgehammer metaphysics, pairing the principle of contradiction with the divine omnipotence, will allow no medium between full reality—evidenced by full real distinction and separability—and nothing at all. One of the first casualties is the *esse intentionale* of the great thirteenth-century metaphysical systems. Either the so-called divine ideas are real being, and thus real multiplicity, in God—which a Christian thinker cannot accept—or they are nothing at all. The divine ideas, venerable tradition though they be, must be resolutely jettisoned in the name of Christian thought purified of all pagan Platonism. Nothing in the divine nature is immutable or eternal except the being of God himself. But God is not an idea:

The divine essence is not an idea, because I ask: the ideas are in the divine mind either subjectively or objectively. Not subjectively, because then there would be subjective plurality in the divine essence, which is manifestly false. Therefore they are there only objectively: but the divine essence does not exist only objectively (i.e., as the object of idea). Therefore it is not an idea.³⁷

As Gabriel Biel, a later Ockhamist disciple, puts it succinctly:

These two, namely, immutability or eternity, and multiplicity or plurality, do not seem compatible (for the divine essence, which is immutable and eternal, does not allow that plurality which is posited among the ideas—for each creatable thing has its own proper and distinct idea—and although this plurality *is*

proper to the creature, immutability and eternity are not, but are proper to God alone).³⁸

The so-called divine ideas must therefore be banished from God and identified simply with creatures themselves as the direct objects, without intermediary of any kind, of the divine act of knowing. The danger of this position, of course, as became all too clear with the unfolding of nominalism, was that, in the name of saving the divine simplicity, all intelligible structures of creatures as causally prior to creation also seem to have vanished from the divine mind, and we are threatened with an unfathomable abyss in God of pure unilluminated will power which seems at the root of intelligence itself, leading to the substitution of divine will rather than intelligence as the ground of morality. As Biel does not hesitate to put it: "It is not because something is right or just that God wills it, but because God wills it therefore it is right and just."³⁹ With the banishment of the divine ideas, we have now come full circle in the spectrum of positions within Christian thought. The divine simplicity has been preserved, but at the expense of that other pillar of traditional Christian metaphysics, which Saint Thomas and other thirteenth-century Christian thinkers worked so hard to bring into equilibrium with the divine simplicity, the theory of divine exemplary ideas. The total negation of the Neoplatonic world of ideas is as unacceptable in Christian philosophical thought as its ultrarealism. A Christian metaphysics of God can survive only at a point of balance in the middle. Professor Anton Pegis has made the suggestion, in a brilliant article on "The Dilemma of Being and Unity,"⁴⁰ that in thus moving to such an extreme anti-Platonic position, Ockham and the nominalists are still the unconscious prisoners of Platonic thought, accepting uncritically one of its basic presuppositions: namely, that the world of intelligibility is necessarily and unavoidably a world of real multiplicity. The Neoplatonists drew the conclusion that, since being and intelligibility were necessarily correlative partners, then the supreme source of reality, the One, must be beyond both being and intelligibility. The nominalists drew the conclusion that, since the supreme principle must be being, Ultimate Being itself must be raised above intelligibility. But both conclusions proceed from the same premise. The only solution is to do away with the premise itself—that an intelligible order is necessarily linked to real multiplicity. It was this decisive move, rendering Christian Neoplatonism finally viable, that we owe to Saint Thomas and other Aristotelian-influenced thinkers of the thirteenth century.

Conclusion

To sum up briefly, the key point I have tried to make, as a metaphysician reflecting on the history of a problem, is that, although large areas of Neoplatonism can be assimilated for the profound enrichment of Christian thought, there is one doctrine that stubbornly resists coherent assimilation: this is the doctrine of the realism of ideas, that the true being of things consists in the pure ideas of them as found in the mind of God (or elsewhere). This is inconsistent first and foremost with the Christian notion of the existential identity of all the divine ideas, however distinct in their intelligibility or *esse intentionale*, with the one simple act of the divine mind thinking them, so that there is no real plurality in God outside that of the three divine Persons. It is also inconsistent, though this point remained more latent in actual medieval discussion, with the value given to created existence as the gift of God's love and the decisive value given to human salvation freely worked out in contingent history through the Incarnation of the Son of God and the free moral response of historical man. The chapter we have just studied illustrates once again that the encounter between Neoplatonism and Christian thought was a deeply challenging one, where genuine assimilation and viable synthesis could be brought about only by profound creative adaptation, in some cases even the final rejection, of some aspects of Neoplatonism.

Is the Ethical Eudaimonism of Saint Thomas Too Self-Centered?

The structure of Saint Thomas's ethics is founded on teleology, the teleology of human nature as ordered toward its own final end, the fulfillment of its perfection, which Saint Thomas identifies under the term "happiness," the happiness appropriate to a human being. Since our highest faculties are those of intellect and will, our happiness will consist mainly in the fulfillment of our longing for truth and goodness in all their fullness. This is fine as far as it goes, and is certainly part of the picture, certain critics of Aquinas say, but it is not the whole picture. It is much too self-centered and individualistic, focusing on my personal fulfillment, the good *for me*. It neglects a whole other side of my experience of willing and valuing: that I value many goods for their own sake, not just for my possession or enjoyment of them. Thus I admire men and women who manifest heroic virtue in their lives, I appreciate beauty and goodness wherever they are found, especially in God, for their own sake, not just for what enjoyment they give to me. In a word, I respond to the objectivity of values as worthy of respect, admiration, love in themselves. And it is a mark of our own nobility and fullness of humanity that we respond thus to values for their own sake. This aspect of the moral development and perfection of the human person seems to be ignored or unduly submerged in Thomistic ethics, modeled as it is on the Aristotelian metaphysics of the teleology of all natural things. That is too limited a perspective to do justice to the richness of the human person and its unique range of responses to the good.

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We hear this charge today principally from phenomenologists of the school of Max Scheler, carried on and adapted by Dietrich von Hildebrand to fit Christian thought. It also has older roots in the thirteenth-century Franciscan thinker Duns Scotus, who clearly distinguishes, with remarkable phenomenological refinement, between two basic types of willing: desiring what is self-perfective (*voluntas commodi*) and admiring or approving what is good in itself for its own sake (*voluntas justitiae*).¹ He registers as a fact this distinction of two kinds of willing or loving, but I am not aware that he goes on to integrate them into some deeper unity, although this may be just ignorance on my part. The representatives of this school of thought today that are best known to me are followers of the Scheler–von Hildebrand approach to phenomenology and objective values, most strongly evidenced in the Institute of Philosophy in Liechtenstein and its various disciples in America and Europe. One of the best of these is John Crosby of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, who has recently expressed this criticism of Saint Thomas in his fine book, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*.²

The above criticism of the teleological approach of Saint Thomas is a serious one that deserves careful reflection on the part of Thomists and, I think, some significant adjustment in the way his doctrine is presented. Here is how I would go about it.

First, we must note the *difference in context* of the two approaches. Saint Thomas sees the human being in its place in a *total metaphysical context* of the intrinsic dynamism of nature in all real beings, as unified in all their activities by ordering toward a single final end, proper to each kind of being, which final end was instilled in them by God their Creator as defining their very natures. The von Hildebrand school, on the other hand, does not seem to take off from this holistic metaphysical perspective at all, but rather to be focused only on a *phenomenological description* of the *experience of humans* as they relate to values—a task they carry out, it must be admitted, with great insight and richness of distinction. But they do not seem as interested in integrating this experiential dimension or human living into a total integrated metaphysics of the good and of the human person and its place in the total order of being. It seems to me that these two different contexts of inquiry should not remain simply side by side without further integration, let alone be opposed to each other.

Second, speaking from the *Thomistic side*, it seems to me that when Thomas lays out his general metaphysical theory of the good, he does remain too narrowly within the Aristotelian perspective of the teleology

of the individual nature and the good defined as that which is perfect in itself and perfective of others. But I also think it is quite easy to correct this by actually examining what in fact for him constitutes the final fulfillment, the happiness, of the human person.

The *final fulfillment* of human beings does not consist in a series of atomically isolated individual fulfillments without relation to each other, but rather in *the total communion* of all human persons (who have not rejected God) both with God and with each other in the “heavenly city of Jerusalem,” the “wedding feast” in heaven, a *single great goal* shared in by all, where the joy of others is part of each one’s own joy. This is not simply a self-centered happiness, since part of each one’s joy is enjoying the joy of others, where all will be friends in the most profound and complete sense. Here the individual fulfillment is inseparable from the fulfillment of all, and would be incomplete without this solidarity with all.

Another key step in the expansion of the apparently narrow teleological perspective is to examine *what in fact constitutes the perfection or fulfillment* of the human faculties of intellect and will. They are significantly different from the powers of all nonspiritual beings below them. The *intellect* as spiritual is oriented by nature toward nothing less than the *totality of all being as true*, without limit, including God. Saint Thomas is not afraid to describe this as “the natural desire for the beatific vision” of God himself, known directly as he is in himself.³ This means that the natural fulfillment of the intellect itself lies along the line of going beyond any narrow finite, self-centered point of view on the truth of being, toward an absolutely objective “*God’s-eye*” *view of all being* as it really is. In a word, the natural perfection of the human intellect—as of any spiritual intellect—is to self-transcend limited subjectivity toward total objectivity, where perfect subjectivity and perfect objectivity coincide, as in God.

Similarly the *natural drive of the will* is toward union with the *total fullness of being as good*. But to go all the way to its conclusion, this very natural drive itself leads us inevitably beyond any narrow, self-centered, limited, or particular point of view toward a “God’s eye” point of view of loving all being as good precisely insofar as each one fits into the harmony of the whole. From this totally objective point of view I would love even my own self, not as the center, or central point of reference, of the universe, but precisely in my place within the whole as God sees and loves me. In a word, the very natural drive of the will itself, because of its peculiar unrestricted horizon, leads beyond any limited self-centered point of view in loving toward total objectivity, as God himself loves. Here again both our

intellect and will tend naturally toward an ideal limit where total subjectivity and total objectivity coincide, the “coincidence of (apparent) opposites.” That is what is so special about the spiritual nature of both intellect and will.

Perhaps the richest *key notion* to pull all this together is the conception—not clearly shared by Aristotle, it seems—of the nature of the human being at its deepest level as being *an image of God*. Our perfection then consists in growing, through our actions, *more and more like God*, the original archetype on which we are all modeled as images. Such a natural fulfillment is clearly both my own personal individual fulfillment but also one that opens out to come as close as possible to coinciding with the absolutely universal authentic center of all goodness in the universe. The wondrous paradox here is that my own perfection consists in becoming more and more self-transcendingly like something far greater than myself—other than myself, yet not radically other, since my *very* being is a finite participation or image of this fullness beyond me. As Jesus said, “He who loses himself [his narrow, self-centered self] will find himself [his deeper, most authentic self].”⁴ Only a participation metaphysics can do justice to such a paradox, it seems to me.

To do justice, however, to the above expanded conception of spiritual self-fulfillment—which *cannot, of its very nature, be narrowly self-centered*—we must also, I suggest, in order to be in tune with the authentic depths of Saint Thomas’s thought, *expand our phenomenological description of what the will is*. To stick within the Aristotelian perspective and describe it only as an intellectual “appetite” or desire for the good as self-perfecting can easily be misleading, as overstressing the perfective aspect of the good. It would be more adequate to describe it as the *spiritual faculty of responding to the good* as presented to it by the intelligence. Since this response is ordered to follow the lead of the intellect, and the intellect’s drive is to understand being in all its fullness objectively, as it really is in itself, then it follows that the *first movement of the will’s response* should be to affectively recognize, appreciate, affirm, take delight in the intrinsic goodness or fullness of perfection present intrinsically in the beings known; in a word, an affirmative, affective response to the truth of being’s goodness as presented to it by the intellect. This is a response of the will appropriate to the inherent perfection or goodness of the being in itself. This should be the primary foundational movement of the will—at least when we develop to our spiritual maturity—in imitation of the ideal of objectivity toward

which the intellect itself tends: objective loving matched to the objective lovableness of real beings themselves.

Then *a second movement of response* of the will to the good presented to it by the intellect will be the desire to share this good, be united with it, in my own being insofar as this is possible and appropriate both to my nature and to its nature. This desire for union with and “possession” (along a wide analogous spectrum from physical to spiritual) is actually the *first to manifest itself chronologically* in the life of a person, because we start off life in a profoundly needy state in every respect, and without the powerful dynamism of desire to fulfill these many and urgent needs we would not survive long, let alone develop enough psychically to allow the more fundamental and contemplative response of the will, following the development to maturity of its guide, the intellect, to emerge. It takes time, experience, and reflection on it to come slowly to the realization that the most fulfilling kind of love of the good is not in fact possessive in the self-centered sense, but appreciative and unitive.

The *best model* to guide us in this growth into mature, wise loving is our experiential knowledge and appreciation of the *love of friendship* between persons. We come to discover there the richness of loving another person *for his or her own sake*, of truly caring for and rejoicing in *their* good, that *they may* be happy, and ourselves *being caught up in the same happiness shared with them*. Within the same experience we then discover that natural longing—and admittedly spiritual need—of being loved mutually for our own goodness in return. We can then go on to discover the great paradoxical truth and mystery that in the last analysis the supreme and most fulfilling goodness in our universe is *shared goodness*, intrinsic goodness flowing over into mutual sharing, the highest expression of what I think can be said to be the most fundamental rhythm of all being: that of giving-receiving, being flowing over into self-communication, reception, and return. Actually the ultimate model or paradigm for this kind of willing the good and authentic self-fulfillment turns out to be the interior life of the Supreme Being, God himself, as revealed in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, where the Father, the ultimate Source, pours out the entire intrinsic goodness of his own divine nature as loving gift to the Son, and the two together in a mutual act of love breathe the Holy Spirit as the unified love-image of their mutual love. And must we not go on to say that an inseparable aspect of the very intrinsic goodness of the Father’s divine nature, which he shares with the Son and the Holy Spirit, is precisely this very inner dynamism of self-communication, reception, and return? May we

not conclude, then, that in *shared goodness*—the most profound dynamism in all real being—the paradoxes of apparent opposition between subjectivity, objectivity, authentic self-fulfillment and self-transcending response to value and the good, come to rest in the integrated harmony of the lived experience of authentic personal love, and the understanding of human persons as in their profoundest nature images of God?

But to assimilate all this into a living Thomistic synthesis, which I think Saint Thomas's thought calls for to fulfill its own basic principles, we must, as I suggested above, restructure his general metaphysics of the good and the will's relation to it to make place for the *dual aspects of the will's response* to the good, first, that of contemplative appreciation, admiration, delight in the presence of the good for its own sake, following the guidance of intellect with its intrinsic drive toward objective contemplation of being as it is in itself and in relation to us; and secondly, its desire for personal fulfillment by appropriate ways of possessing (in the widest analogous sense) or perhaps better union with the good. Thus Thomists could at the same time do justice to the penetrating insights of both Duns Scotus and the von Hildebrand phenomenologists of response to value for its own sake, while integrating these into a wider and more all-embracing metaphysical synthesis, through the metaphysics of participation, which I do not find explicitly enough expressed (or perhaps fully appreciated) by them.

And finally, might we not say, remaining within the horizon of an authentic Thomism itself, that, since for Saint Thomas the definition of the good is *that which is perfect in itself*⁵ (that is, a certain fullness of being worthy of being recognized and admired as such by a spiritual will following the apprehension of this inner worth by guiding intellect) *and perfective of something, in that precise order*, then the appropriate response of the spiritual faculty of *will* should follow the same order—that is, *first*, recognize and affectively admire and approve of this inner worth or intrinsic goodness aspect of the being in question, in a self-transcending response to the being in and for itself, in imitation of the intellect itself, and then *secondly*, recognize and go out toward the same being for its perfective relation to me, its role of self-fulfillment for a human subject? This might free the doctrine of Saint Thomas from its present too narrow Aristotelian focus on the second aspect of the good, and bring it considerably closer to the same priority of will response to the good insisted on, not without good reason, by both Scotus and the von Hildebrand phenomenologists.

Conscience and the Person

Conscience and the person fit together inseparably. There is no mature person without the voice of conscience, and no conscience save in a person. Conscience is also perhaps the most distinctive expression of what it means to be a person, in the two main aspects of the person; that is to say, it is the most distinctive expression of what it means to be human, and of what it means to be me. Let us see how this is the case.

What Is Conscience?

Understanding what is called “conscience” is clearly at the heart of any adequate theory of morality.¹ Yet, as one author has put it: “‘Conscience’ is another word like ‘sin’—often used but little understood. Trying to explain conscience is like trying to nail jello to the wall; just when you think you have it pinned down, part of it begins to slip away.”² To explain exactly how conscience works is indeed difficult. But the main lines of what conscience is and of the role it plays in our moral lives seem to me to be clear enough, and accessible to all—fortunately so, since “Follow your conscience” is one of the fundamental principles of the moral life.

Let us first pin down what we are talking about in our experience when we speak of “my conscience.” This refers to that “inner voice” that advises me and commands me in the presence of a moral decision as to how to act in a given situation: “This action is good; you *ought* to do it, you *should* do it,” or “This action is evil; you *should not* do it.” That “inner voice” declares not only what is good to do or evil to avoid, but also an *obligation* to

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do the good, speaking to us with a certain authority, and coming to us from some higher source. This is what we all experience when our individual moral conscience begins to manifest itself clearly enough from around the age of six or seven on. I am talking here about the actual experience—the phenomenology, if you will—of conscience that the vast majority of mature human beings have, however they may describe or explain it. I am not talking of the various explanatory theories of philosophers and professional psychologists, many of whom, of course, have denied or tried to explain away the validity and authority of conscience as the authentic voice of reason (for example, Freud,³ various materialist reductionists, etc.)

But just what is this “inner voice” we call “conscience”? Where does it come from and what is its role in my personal life? We must first distinguish it from the “superego”—a term first coined by Freud—which seems like it in many ways and is often confused with it by immature people. The superego is an inner censor of our actions, telling us what to do or not to do, using the potent threat of guilt if we do not obey. It is superimposed on our own consciousness, not as our authentic inner voice, but as the voice of some human authority outside of us (parents, teachers, society, etc.), expressing values not because we ourselves understand and accept them as such, but because we fear losing the love and approval of these outside authority figures. Children start off this way, but are supposed to grow out of it to develop their own authentic voice of conscience; some adults, however, never quite grow out of it, remaining like moral children all or most of their lives.

The voice of authentic moral conscience, on the other hand, speaks to us as our own inner voice, commanding us in the name of our own better selves, in terms of values that we ourselves understand and have internalized as our own, as though our own better selves were guiding us, at the same time that they were expressing the voice of some higher, more ultimate authority.

What, then, is the *nature* of this authentically personal moral conscience, this inner judge of which we speak metaphorically in terms of a “voice”? I shall be following here the main lines of Saint Thomas’s theory of conscience, because it seems to me to be the most satisfactory. When Saint Thomas first introduced it in the thirteenth century, in the midst of intense discussion and conflicting opinions on the subject, it seemed uncomfortably novel to many, even dangerous with regard to his firm teaching on the obligation to follow even an erroneous conscience—which many at the time explicitly rejected. But the powerful clarity and coherent

unity of his doctrine gradually won out and the doctrine itself went on to become what is now the most widely accepted tradition among Catholic thinkers.⁴

Conscience is not constituted by a feeling or emotion, although it can be accompanied by strong emotions when we strongly feel positive or negative about the values or disvalues that shine forth to us when we are making a judgment of conscience. It is not a special faculty or power of the soul distinct from both intellect and will. It is not an act of the will or a combination of intellect and will, like the free will decision. According to Saint Thomas, it is a strictly cognitive act, a *judgment of our reason*, which applies the basic innate orientation of the human spirit toward the total human good, our final end, to the *particular situation* confronting us and calling for decision here and now. This basic orientation toward the total good that is our final end Saint Thomas calls “the natural law imprinted in our hearts by God” (*synderesis* as the medievals called it after Aristotle), a participation in the divine law in God’s intellect which is His plan for our happiness and final destiny. The latter by itself, however, remains very general, including the intuitive grasp of the first principle of practical intelligence, “Do good and avoid evil,” and of a small number of basic general goods to be pursued and evils avoided. But our actual moral life is lived out in the day-to-day particular moral judgments called for by the particular situations here and now confronting us as our life unfolds. We need some power to mediate between this general orientation toward the good and the particular instances of moral good and evil confronting us in the existential order, or if you will, to *apply the general to the particular* in the order of moral action. This is precisely the role of conscience: when nourished by this deep natural orientation toward the good, to judge just how to apply it to the particular situation now facing me and declare that this is the good act I ought to do or the evil I should avoid here and now.

Saint Thomas insists—insightfully, I think—that the voice of conscience is a *judgment of my reason alone* addressed to my whole person declaring, “This is the good you ought to do, this the evil you ought to avoid.” Conscience, in that sense, is both a declaration of fact and the *authoritative imposition of an obligation* to act this way or that, which has in it the nature of a command, a “moral imperative,” as it is called: “Do this, avoid that.” But an *ought*, a moral obligation, is not a compulsion. It is still up to me to decide freely with my whole person—intellect, will, emotions all working together—just how I am in fact going to act, either following the moral command of my reason, ignoring it or rejecting it.

This voice of conscience operates both *antecedently*, before my free decision, guiding me with either a warning or command, and *consequently*, after the decision, with praise or blame. It is thus an expression of one of the *fundamental roles of reason* in a rational being: to impose order on the multiplicity of our experience by discerning the priority of values and the relation of means to ends, and to guide the will—or, more correctly, the whole person—in choosing wisely between the finite goods offered me in order to move toward the final end inscribed in our natures. Note the profound difference between this classical conception of reason as the wise *guide* of all our other faculties, counseling us as to the ends and means we choose to fulfill our innate destiny, and the conception of reason, held by later thinkers, in which reason, because it can no longer attain truth, it can no longer guide our actions, becoming merely the skilled instrument for helping us attain what we desire, to *get what we want*, the servant of will rather than its master.

Because the “voice of conscience” manifests itself not just as giving advice but as commanding us, laying an *obligation* upon us, in the mode of a judge—which we are free to follow or reject but not to abolish or change at will—it has taken on, almost universally, in all the past cultures we know, the aspect of “*the voice of God*,” or of some higher power guiding us toward the authentic good for which we are destined, or at the very least, of “*the voice of our inner* (or higher, better, authentic) *self*,” which we should respect and listen to if it is our wish to become truly good persons, deserving the respect of others. Or perhaps, more accurately, it has taken on the aspect of the voice of my inner true self, which is inspired by and echoes the voice of the higher power that made me and holds me responsible for my actions. Thus an ancient Egyptian text tells us, “The heart [by which is meant the living wisdom of the whole person as a unity of mind, heart, and emotions] is an excellent witness. One must stand in fear of departing from its guidance.”⁵ Immanuel Kant describes it as “the consciousness of an interior court of justice within man,”⁶ the Second Vatican Council, as “man’s most secret core, and his sanctuary.”⁷ The Vatican II declaration continues: “Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey.”⁸ But the most eloquent description I know of is also one of the oldest, that of the Roman philosopher Seneca in a letter to his young friend Lucilius:

God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. Thus do I say, Lucilius: a sacred and august spirit resides within us, and takes stock of our good and evil actions, and is the guardian and avenger of our deeds.⁹

Saint Thomas explains why it is appropriate for us to call the voice of conscience “the voice of God.” Since it lays on us or binds us with a moral obligation that is unconditional, a “categorical imperative,” as Kant later put it, it is not possible for human reason on its own to bind the person owning it, to bind its own self authoritatively and unconditionally. That can only derive from some higher authority that has power over us, that ultimately is God speaking through the innate necessary orientation toward the ultimate good imprinted in our hearts by the Creator of our nature as the natural law, which is a participation in the divine law in the mind of God exercising providence over us. Yet, since this voice of conscience is not directly and immediately the voice of God speaking within us, but only as mediated through our own imperfect human reason, marked by its own history, it can be fallible and, in certain cases, even erroneous. But we must still follow it, until corrected, as our immediate guide to moral action, for, as Aquinas says, “Every human being must act according to reason, the reason that he himself has from God, whether natural or infused.”¹⁰

How Does It Operate?

The practical judgment of conscience is not arrived at by some abstract argument or logical deduction from some more general set of moral principles, requiring special intellectual training or skills, or high theoretical intellectual development. It is not really a philosophical type of activity at all. Most of the time, that is, when the moral values at stake emerge clearly enough, it manifests itself as a *spontaneous, quasi-intuitive judgment* that sizes up the whole concrete situation which confronts me in a moral decision, together with its relation to me and how it resonates with my own basic moral commitment to the good in my journey towards my ultimate fulfillment. That is, it sees in a kind of intuitive insight how it all fits together—it lights up to the mind, so to speak, in a kind of flash—then immediately speaks to me in a *command*, “This is the good demanding your response here, do it!” or, “This is evil, a violation of your moral commitment to be a good person, a denial of your authentic self, don’t do it!” Saint Thomas Aquinas sometimes speaks of it as a kind of “knowledge by connaturality,” a knowledge not by abstract concepts or purely intellectual reasoning, but by a certain existential affinity and resonance of your whole person—mind, will, heart all working together—with the moral

goodness involved, or by dissonance and repulsion in the presence of evil.¹¹ The judgment is strictly concrete and existential, focused on the situation here and now before me, although the general principle or value involved can shine forth, so to speak, as applying here and now. Thus a well-developed, sensitive conscience does not at all require that one be an educated person, or possess a highly developed speculative intelligence. Luckily so—for otherwise either the process would work too slowly to meet the often urgent needs of action or else only the well-educated could develop a mature conscience—neither of which is the case, as we know from experience.

The *mature conscience* does require the following: (1) a certain *self-possession* through self-consciousness and the ability to *reflect* on one's actions; (2) a basic *commitment* of oneself as a person to the moral good, to live as a good person, which is the conscious taking possession and ratification of the deep innate drive of our nature as finalized towards its ultimate good, put in us by our Creator before our conscious moral life begins; this makes us *want* to discern the authentic moral good in the present situation; (3) a certain fund of *practical life experience* from which we have learned to recognize the most probable consequences of certain types of actions, expressed by the maxim "Actions have consequences." (That, by the way, is why the best way to train young people, or to help anyone make good moral decisions is not to tell them what to do, but to help them see the *consequences* of their possible choices and face up to them: "Do you really want these consequences to happen?" "Can you live at peace with them?" This moment of reflection allows the values involved to shine forth, so to speak, in their relation to me in this situation, or to be grasped by my practical life-oriented intelligence, which in turn responds spontaneously, if I do not block it, in such a way as to enable it to carry out its natural role of ordering my life and commanding my will as a rational being); and (4) the *personalization* of this voice as conscience, so that I am at least implicitly aware that this is genuinely my own judgment, proceeding from insight into the values which I have personally internalized and expressing my own authentic self and/or the voice of a higher authority (recognized as such—not just the voice of some other human person received passively from outside, such as parents, the society in which I live, my peer group, etc., to which I bow from fear of unpleasant consequences) speaking within me. A certain level of honest self-knowledge is required for this.

In Saint Thomas's explanation of the underlying structure of moral action he posits as a necessary *presupposition* of the above phenomenological description the innate positive *dynamism of the whole person*, intellect

and will, *toward the final good* which defines our nature—the so-called natural law imprinted in our hearts by God our Creator—that is, the natural orientation of the intellect toward recognizing being as truly good, plus the natural orientation of the will toward union with the authentic good fulfilling our nature, which in fact can only be the Infinite Good. It is this deep preconscious dynamism of the whole person, as consciously recognized and ratified by the mature conscience, which is the inner dynamo or source of psychic energy impelling the practical intelligence to spontaneously discern the appropriate or morally good action in the situation by which I am confronted, and then to carry it out, yet another step in the direction of my authentic final fulfillment rather than an obstacle. I am not obliged to follow this command of conscience, of course, since it does not force my freedom but only lays a claim of moral obligation upon me. But without this *a priori* natural orientation toward the good, there would be no spontaneous impulse on the part of practical reason to discern and command us to choose the good and avoid the evil in this particular case. As Rudolf Hoffmann comments insightfully in his fine article on conscience in Karl Rahner's *Encyclopedia of Theology*: "As with every genuine appreciation of value, an attitude of reverence and love [for the good] is an essential pre-condition both for the development and for the activity of conscience."¹² It is worthy of note that in late medieval thought (notably Scotus, Ockham, the Nominalists, a number of post-Thomistic scholastics), and in much of modern and contemporary Western thought (Freud, Sartre, etc.), this innate orientation of the will toward the good, its inclination to follow the guidance of reason, is submerged or denied, with the result that the will has become a radically *autonomous faculty*, independent of the intellect, and indifferent or neutral in itself toward any good, even the profound pull of the Infinite Good, so that free choice proceeds from a radically free, intellectually unmoored will. This is the well-known tradition known as *voluntarism*, manifest in the insistence of Scotus, and especially Ockham, that no other reason can be given why the will is free than that it *is in fact free*, for such is its nature, and that any attempt to ground it more deeply in intelligence leads to determinism and undermines its absolute freedom toward all goods, including the Infinite Good. This is the inspiration behind the political philosophy of the absolute power of the monarch, who can declare, when asked for some justification of his commands: "Let my will stand in place of any reason" (*Stet pro ratione voluntas*). In such a tradition, moral goodness is profoundly transformed: it is no longer obedience to the voice of conscience as speaking for my

own reason's insight into the good, nor a participation in the divine wisdom, but obedience, rather, to a divine command *simply because it is commanded*, willed by God. And this will of God is so inscrutable to our reason that God, in fact, if he had wanted to, could have turned all the Ten Commandments, except the first, upside down so as to command the opposite. We would, as such, be morally obliged to commit adultery, steal, lie, murder, etc., and not be in a position to question the reason for our being so obliged. "In fact, God has not commanded thus, but he could have."¹³ This is the so-called "divine command ethics," which seems to have been the position of the original Calvinists and Lutherans, who were opposed to philosophical or purely rational attempts to justify morality or solve moral problems. This is clearly quite a different explanation of the structure of conscience from the Thomistic one, which we have been drawing upon here. We will not argue this point further.

The Limitations of Conscience

Conscience can be uncertain. In perhaps the majority of moral situations which confront us along the path of our lives, the moral values involved shine forth clearly enough so that conscience can, quickly enough, size up the situation and speak out its command without much hesitation, as difficult as it might be for us to acquiesce to its commands. But not rarely we will be faced with situations so complex, where the priority of values involved will be so obscure, that we will be unable to see clearly the appropriate moral decision to make. In such a case, conscience can for some time remain prudently suspended, while we unravel the various apparent conflicts of values and bring some order into the complexity. A mature conscience should itself warn us here not to jump too quickly before we can see clearly.

Sometimes we can never reach this clarity despite our sincerest efforts. Then, since we may have to act in real life, we can decide to follow one path of action as the most plausible, accessible to my reason here and now. Another equally good and committed moral person may decide the opposite according to his practical decision made in good faith. Both will be acting morally within the context of how far their limited vision can guide them. That is all we are asked to do. "For every human being," Saint Thomas tells us, "is obliged to act according to reason, i.e., the

reason which he or she actually possesses, whether natural or supernaturally infused," not anybody else's.¹⁴ It is part of our basic human dignity as persons to take responsibility for our own journey toward God.

Conscience is fallible. Although the voice of conscience is ultimately, like the natural law of which it is an application, a participation in the divine law for us, and so an echo of the voice of God, it is so only through the mediation of our own finite and imperfect intelligence, which can be fallible not only as speculative but also as practical. It can fail to grasp or can misread the relevant moral values involved in a particular situation, or even misread the actual situation itself, and this for many reasons proper to its own history: lack of mature self-awareness, lack of ability or willingness to reflect on one's actions and their probable consequences, distorted training by parents or other social influences which induce biases or blind spots in the recognition of certain moral values, lack of adequate life experience to interpret accurately what is at stake in the situation before one, especially if it is complicated, impatience or undue haste in making judgments, even previous bad habits of ignoring or rejecting the voice of conscience, etc., etc.

Nonetheless, fallible and even erroneous though it may be in a particular case, we must in the last analysis follow what *our conscience* clearly commands us to do with certainty, after we have sincerely tried our best to come to a reasonable decision, since our own reason is the ultimate immediate norm of all responsible human action. We must act according to the light *we* have, dim or even distorted though it may be, since it is a decision we are personally responsible for. However, we also have the moral obligation coming from a mature conscience to try our best to make our conscience a *well-informed* one, and, in this regard, to solicit the help of others as we seek to come to a decision as objectively as we can, and as close to authentic moral wisdom.¹⁵

Saint Thomas is uncompromising on the obligation to follow the voice of my own personal conscience, to act according to the light of *my reason*, the reason that God has given to *me personally*. We now take this position for granted; it has become the central position of traditional Catholic philosophy and theology. But it was quite an innovation when Saint Thomas first introduced it in the thirteenth century. The Franciscan masters and most others, even his own master, Saint Albert the Great, were teaching that, out of respect for the divine law, expressed in the natural essences and order of things, it was a sin to follow an erroneous conscience. Saint Thomas broke decisively with this tradition, standing at the cutting edge

of, and giving precise expression to, a dramatic new wave of awakening of medieval consciousness to the interiority and personalization of the moral and psychological life. It began with Abelard's introduction of the interior intention of the personal subject as a crucial element in the constitution of the moral act, provoked intense discussion within the university faculties, and was given mature technical expression by Saint Thomas himself. What it meant was that in the analysis of the moral act, the good that was the object of the will's free moral choice was no longer the objective good in itself, but the good *as presented to me by my own personal reason*, the reason that *I have* from God, natural or infused. This is a dramatic affirmation of the dignity of the individual moral subject, personal and free, as Chenu puts it in his illuminating brief study of the awakening of personal consciousness in the medieval civilization of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁶ Saint Thomas, however, hastens to restore the balance with the objectivity of morality by adding that the *objective moral goodness* of an act in itself is still determined by conformity with the *objective norm of right reason (recta ratio)*, that is, reason as properly ordered to the human final end in accordance with nature. And one has an ever-present personal obligation of conscience to try to conform one's conscience as closely as possible to this ideal of objective moral wisdom.

Conscience as Privileged Manifestation of Personhood

From all this it emerges that this remarkable human endowment of conscience is one of the most privileged places, though not the only one, where the distinctive characteristics of personhood—both its solidarity with the rest of the human family and its uniqueness as proper to me—shine forth most luminously. Because of its root in my basic innate orientation to the total human good, which I share with all human beings possessing the same specific nature, it declares my *solidarity* with all my fellow human beings, so that it is possible for them to instruct me in how to be a good moral person and to praise and blame me for my performance in this common human project. But it also makes manifest unmistakably my own *uniqueness*, the uniqueness of my own history, which comprises not only the environment I was placed in and the influences I was subjected to, but also my personal free responses to my environment and influences. Included in this, the uniqueness of my own history, are the following: the degree to which I have self-possession in self-knowledge

and the ability and willingness to reflect honestly on my own actions; the degree to which my reflections on my life experience have enabled me to recognize the most probable or certain consequences of certain types of action; and, above all, my own basic free commitment—at least implicit—to become a good human being, to respond to the guiding and commanding voice of my conscience. Since my response is basically free, however, this history can also include the gradual development of bad habits of response to this inner voice—systematically ignoring it, distracting myself so I do not have to pay attention to it, permitting my own immediate self-satisfaction to become the central motivating force of my life—though it conflicts with the authentic final end implanted in my nature by God, the “natural law imprinted on our hearts.” Such habits of negative response to the voice of conscience tend to blur its vision and weaken its voice so as to reduce it almost to silence, depriving it of the energy flowing from a basic conscious commitment to the good. It does not seem, however, that the voice can ever be totally silenced, though opinions differ on this. At any rate there is much truth in the adage “If you don’t act according as your conscience judges, you will end up judging according as you act.” Included in all of the above, of course, is the influence of our own *early education*, how we were taught to live according to moral values first by enforced obedience, then by being encouraged to recognize and respond to values on our own, and especially by the power of good—or bad—example in actual living. Then there is the influence of *social pressure*, both of the whole culture and/or peer groups, in either sensitizing us to values or imprinting unconscious biases, prejudices, moral blind spots that, if unrecognized or unrepudiated, can distort the clarity and sensitivity of our practical judgments of conscience.

All the above concerns the uniqueness in the process by which I come to *make my own practical moral judgments* and to *express* them by the voice of conscience. But far more striking and luminous is the uniqueness that shines forth in my *free response* to the voice of my own individualized conscience. The voice of conscience guides me, warns me, commands me how to act. But it does not force or determine my free will. I alone, my whole person, expressing myself through my willed decision, am responsible for making this decision—and nobody else. The child becomes, rather dramatically, conscious of this around the age of six or seven, but the mature person is acutely conscious of it, if willing to reflect at all on its action. *Beforehand*: “It’s up to me to decide; the buck stops here. I am responsible.” And *afterwards*: “I did it. And I’m glad—or sorry—I did it.”

Facing up to this unique personal responsibility and taking personal responsibility for the result rather than shifting the blame onto someone else lies at the very core of the awareness and acceptance of yourself as a unique person, an “I” in the full sense of the term, having the dignity and responsibility of *self-governing your* own life toward its final end. Saint Thomas, at the very beginning of part two of his great *Summa Theologiae*, in a striking passage on the return of the human being to God by the moral life and the life of grace, declares that this is why we are images of God in leading a good moral life. The essence of the moral life for him does not consist, as it did for many other Christian thinkers, in *obedience to law*, even God’s law, since God is not bound by any law imposed on him from without. We could not be images of God in this way. Our imaging of God consists rather in our *participation in his providence over* life. God is provident by his wise action over the whole universe; we are not big enough to do that (though some seem to think they are). But we can exercise our own wise *providence over our own lives* (and those in our care, such as children, workers, etc.), over our own turf, so to speak, and in this we are images of God, of one of the central perfections of God. Such is the profound dignity of the mature human person in the role of freely self-governing his or her own life toward the final end laid down by God.

Saint Thomas is not at all afraid to follow out the implications of this fundamental obligation of every human person to take personal responsibility to guide his or her own life toward its final end by the light of his or her own reason, even where it leads to conclusions surprising—at least at first—to many, in the area of obedience to higher human authority. Thus, speaking of the obedience of a subject to any human superior, even a bishop—and by implication, of course, even to the Pope—Saint Thomas makes this ringing affirmation of the independence of conscience of every human person:

It is not the place of the subject to pass judgment on the command in itself in its own wisdom and goodness, but it is his responsibility to pass judgment on his own fulfilling of the command here and now. For every human being is bound to examine his own actions according to the knowledge which he himself has from God, whether natural or acquired, or infused from above: for every human being is obliged to act according to reason [that is, his own personal possession or participation in reason].¹⁷

I once read this out to a group of young nuns without telling them where it came from, and asked them what they thought of it. “Oh, that’s far out,”

they replied. When I said that it was actually from Saint Thomas Aquinas, their response was, “They certainly didn’t teach us that in the novitiate!” Once when I gave a talk on Saint Thomas and the person to the Catholic Newman Club at New York University and read this passage, a very conservative Catholic layman broke in, “The Pope’s the ultimate authority. If he tells you to do something, you’ve got to do it. None of the private judgment stuff.” “But this is Saint Thomas Aquinas speaking, declared the Common Doctor of the Church,” I replied. “Well,” he said, without a moment’s hesitation, “then he’ll have to go!” In a lecture not too many years ago in a well-known Catholic seminary for the training of priests, I found that the same text was a surprise—although a welcome one—to many of the seminarians, and even—to *my* surprise—to a few of their teachers. But it is nothing far out at all. It is the constant traditional teaching of all the *great* Catholic philosophers and theologians in the Church—at least after Aquinas.

A shocking example of what it means to abdicate this basic obligation to take personal responsibility for your own actions in response to your own moral conscience was given us not too long ago by the Nazi war criminal Hermann Göring in a conversation in the lobby of the Reich Chancellery with his fellow Nazi leaders, when he admitted quite openly, even boasted of having carried out Hitler’s orders to burn down the Reichstag building. He ended the conversation with the chilling words, “I have no conscience. My conscience *is Adolf Hitler*.” It was this same mindset that brought those Nazi leaders to carry out the Führer’s orders to exterminate the Jews. This is the abdication of the very core of what it means to be an authentic person. And haven’t we all met, in our own experience at least, some people who seem to be skating all too close to this fatal precipice, which might be called “the suicide of the self”?¹⁸

It is important to warn, however, that to apply wisely this obligation to judge personally whether to obey or not in a particular case requires considerable maturity, humility, and good judgment, not just giving in to an ego trip. A mature conscience will judge prudently that as a general rule, for reasons of the greater good, it is better to obey than follow your independent judgment, even though it might be better in itself. But once one’s conscience speaks clearly to forbid something, one must have the courage to take a stand, cost what it may. The Pope might have gone crazy, for example, just before he gave you the order your conscience forbids you to execute, or been given a mind-bending pill, etc. Doing the act is your responsibility, not his.

Conscience in the Christian Life of Grace

The operation of conscience which is part of our natural equipment for the human journey towards its final end is not destroyed but *transformed* when subsumed into the spiritual life of the baptized Christian.¹⁹ It is now illuminated from above by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, counsel, wisdom, etc., which lend it quicker and deeper insight into what is the will of God for us to do in the present situation, often surprising those judging from natural practical wisdom alone. In general it lifts this voice of the inner judge, which can often seem to us on the natural level as somewhat aloof and impersonal to us, even at times a somewhat unwelcome intruder into our spontaneous plans for self-satisfaction, into a whole new dimension of *personal relationship with God*, our loving Father. It now appears as a personal call of God into closer intimacy with him, uniting our will to his (“Thy will be done”) in our growth in holiness and slow transformation from innate hidden image to a more manifest likeness of his own divine wisdom and goodness, something whose intrusion we no longer resent or accept reluctantly, but welcome as the personal loving guidance of the Holy Spirit itself.

As a result, it becomes more clear, more sensitive, more continuously present to our willing attentiveness as a function of our “living in the presence of God.” Rudolf Hoffmann aptly writes:

The conscience of the Christian will fulfill its function only when every dawning value is deeply experienced as a gracious approach to the divine perfection and every situation of decision as a gift and a call of God, as a possibility of Christian loyalty in the presence of the divine “Thou.”²⁰

Thus deliberate conscious commitment to be willing to follow the call of conscience, at whatever level, natural or supernatural, turns out to be one of the most fundamental and indispensable manifestations of our unconditioned commitment to that most profound of all calls sounding deep within us, summoning us to become the unique authentic image of God that he has destined us to be—which in the last analysis is what it really means to be an authentic person.

Democracy, Ethics, Religion: An Intrinsic Connection

During his many years of professional life as a political philosopher, Francis Canavan has worked consistently to articulate and pass on the great tradition of humanistic political philosophy, grounded in a solid philosophical anthropology, but critically rethought and adapted to our American culture and democratic way of life—a political philosophy that tries to work out a harmonious balance between individual and community, individual rights and the exigencies of the common good. I would like to add my support to his impressive work by this modest reflection on the role played by two important pieces in this synthesis, which seem to me to have an intrinsic, but often overlooked, connection with the long-term viability of our democratic way of life. By this I mean the intrinsic connection between democracy and a normative code of ethics, the latter supported by some religious belief system.

The dominant political thinking in America today is strongly, almost obsessively, committed to the ideal of separation of church and state. I think the ideal is a good one in itself and has served this country well for a long time. But there is more to it than that. On the one hand, it is certainly wise for the church not to control the state and for the state not to control the church or favor one church over another. On the other hand, it may well be that there is some intrinsic connection between the political health of a democracy and the vital functioning in it of some code of normative ethics supported by some form or forms of religious belief

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that lends the code its normative authority. This connection would have both civic and transcendent dimensions. First, at the civic level, there would be a connection between democracy and some normative ethical code held and practiced by the majority of its citizens. Second, this civic creed or code would be grounded in, and supported by, some transcendent form of religious belief, and would be subscribed to by a significant majority of the society's citizens. This does not have to be any one form of religion, just *some* form, or a plurality of forms, which support some similar code of normative ethical conduct. I also wish to stress that the connection mentioned above is not based on some religious belief or postulate, but is the result simply of an analysis of the nature of the democratic political order as such, combined with thoughtful reflection on the actual history of political societies—democracies in particular—in the West. I am much influenced in coming to this conclusion by the writings of Pierre Manent and his school of French Catholic political philosophers.¹ I am really presenting here what are to me some especially significant conclusions inspired by their work.

Democracy and Normative Ethics

My thesis first requires me to connect the long-term healthy exercise of the democratic way of life with the need for a normative code of ethics. The point is this: In order for a democracy to work in practice in a sustainable way, a significant majority of its citizens must accept and follow in practice some normative code of ethics. If they do not, what will result is a chaos of conflicting individual or group self-interests without respect for the rights of others; and to protect these rights there will have to be a very large police force, perhaps one for every few citizens—in other words, the equivalent of a police state. A police state can indeed survive in a totalitarian or authoritarian state for a time at least, but not in an authentic working democracy, governed by the publicly expressed will of the majority. There is no use replying that the majority of sensible, clear-thinking people will realize that it serves their own good to compromise on individual desires in order to achieve certain essential common goods. If they follow no normative ethical code, they will not have enough self-discipline to display practical wisdom and act according to the virtue of prudence. Only if a significant majority of the citizens conform most of their actions to some common moral code will a viable democratic society be able to maintain itself for any appreciable length of time. Those who do happen to

threaten the rights of others will be a manageable minority who can be taken care of by laws and a modest number of law enforcement officials. Lastly, the common code of ethics—common in terms of some shared core—will have to be *normative*, something that people feel they *ought* to follow, not just something they might or might not follow, according to their own whims. This code must also be perceived as something more than a product of immediate desire or a contract that persons are free to opt out of when it no longer serves their individual self-interests.

The force of this connection emerges inevitably, I think, if one reflects on certain realistic possibilities. If only 5 or 10 percent of the population, for example, disobeys the laws laid down by the democratic government, a modest police force will be adequate to enforce the laws. But suppose some 90 percent of a society's businessmen practice serious fraud in their business operations. It would then take a very large police force to enforce the laws, probably even a police state. And if the police officials themselves are equally infected with this lack of moral probity, why cannot the fraudulent businessmen corrupt the policemen too by bribery? Such a state of affairs cannot long last in a democracy. A viable democracy, therefore, must count on the observance, for the most part, of a normative moral code of conduct by a significant majority of its citizens; a democracy of free citizens will not put up for long with a police state.

Democracy Itself Cannot Mandate a Normative Code of Ethics

The first connection has now been made: the dependence of a viable democracy on the acceptance of a normative code of ethics held and practiced for the most part by a significant majority of its citizens. A second implication now follows. It is impossible in principle for a democratic political regime to mandate that all its citizens accept any particular code of ethics, given its fundamental commitment to the equal rights of all to free speech and free personal beliefs. Nor will it do any good anyway to mandate adherence to such a code if a significant majority of its citizens are not disposed on their own to accept and practice it. If the regime tries to force some such mandate on its people against the will of a large number of persons, this will not be effective unless the regime moves toward some variant of an authoritarian or police state, as we argued above.

Now we have a problem. On the one hand, a viable democratic regime requires the acceptance of some normative moral code on the part of the

majority of its citizens, yet, on the other hand, it seems to be incapable of ensuring on its own that such a necessary condition be fulfilled, leaving it in a precarious state. How is this to be resolved? Is it merely a matter of chance, or the good luck of happening to have a basically well-intentioned, enlightened population? This brings us to the third item in our title: the role of religion.

*Religious Belief as the Only Secure Support
for a Normative Code of Ethics*

To support the argument that religious belief is the only secure foundation for a normative code of ethics, we need to turn, not to some theoretical argument, but to the existential experience of humankind, that is, to history. Now, it does seem that if we examine human history, as far as we know it, every culture has imposed on itself some normative moral code of conduct that the majority of its citizens have, for the most part, accepted and practiced. Furthermore, this normative moral code is supported by the authority of some religious belief system that grounds its normative or obligatory character. That is, the code is mandated by some transcendent source. This is obvious in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and seems implied in Confucianism and most other major religions.

It may be argued that Buddhism is an exception to this, since the Buddha refused to talk about God or any gods: "You must save yourself, by following the Eightfold Path of morality and meditation."² This seems to have been the case in the original, more simple Buddhist message, still evident in Theravada Buddhism as practiced in Southeast Asia. Still, very quickly the Buddha himself became a great transcendent figure, "greater than all gods, demons, or powers of the universe."³ And in some of the higher or Mahayana traditions, the Buddha was revered as an eternal transcendent being with innumerable reincarnations in human form. So in practice the Buddha himself soon became by the awesome example of his own life and teaching a kind of transcendent authority figure for his way of life and its moral code. As a result, Buddhism is now classified, with good reason, as a religion, one of the great world religions, though of a special, apparently nontheistic kind.

In short, in all the durable human societies with which we are familiar, the common codes of moral conduct structuring the lives of citizens have derived their normative authority not just from the individual free choice

of any individual or group of individuals, but because they were mandated by some superhuman, transcendent authority to which religious respect and obedience are due. Nothing short of this transcendent authority is adjudged really strong enough to keep under control the willfulness of our flawed human nature, with its passions and tendency towards self-centeredness and disregard of the rights of others.

It is true that small groups within a culture can maintain among themselves a moral code of conduct with no apparent religious origin or backing—that is, codes that claim to embody a purely secular morality. We see this in our Western culture with groups like the Ethical Culture Society, the secular humanist movement, and so on. But their perdurance for any length of time presupposes a high degree of intelligence, education, and self-discipline that cannot practically be extended to a whole society of ordinary people, that is, to a democracy where all are considered equal in their participation in self-government. In other words, the normative character of a moral code of conduct cannot be adequately grounded in the abstract formulation of the code, considered simply in itself. It needs some authoritative lawgiver, one with moral authority over those bound by the law, to confer normative moral authority on the law itself. No democracy, by its own principles, has of itself such moral authority over its free citizens.

It seems, then, that, by reflecting on both the nature of the democratic political regime and the practical experience of human nature through history, we are led to discern a structural connection in the practical political order between an effective, stable democratic regime, some common mandatory code of ethics accepted and practiced by at least a significant majority of its citizens, and some higher religious authority either mandating or supporting such a code. This trio—democracy, a mandatory code of ethics, and religious grounding for those ethics—has now emerged as the practically necessary supporting framework or foundation for any democratic system of government.

Note that this intrinsic connection between democracy, a mandatory code of ethics, and religion is not derived from some religious belief or doctrine, or some a priori metaphysical theory, but from an objective analysis of the nature of democracy as a political regime and the experience of human history. Whether or not one is happy with this state of affairs is not really relevant; this is the way our human nature in the concrete seems to be structured—that's all. It may be objected, however, that even though past human history provides no examples of human societies whose ethical

codes have not been supported by some religious authority, we live now, especially in the West, in a new world of secular societies that profess no dependence on any religion as a support for their codes of law. This new political state of affairs has not yet been sufficiently tested to tell whether it can work effectively over the long run. But it seems to be working well enough at present, at least in some places, as far as can be publicly observed. America, with its separation of church and state, is given as one example of a secular society, as are also the now heavily secularized Western European democracies. The example of China is also sometimes mentioned, although China is not a democracy in any proper sense.

This seems, at first, a serious objection indeed. But let us look more closely. First of all, when we argued earlier for the need for some religious authority to ground the ethical code of a viable society, we did not mean any particular church or institutional form of religion, but only some pervasive religious belief in some higher ultimate reality, some transcendent order on which humanity depends. The United States is supposed to be a political regime independent of any public religious commitment. Yet, in fact, some 90 percent or more of the American people are reported to believe in God and our being dependent on God in some way, whether this always manifests itself in public churchgoing, some institutional commitment, or not.⁴ The intense religious commitments, principally Christian, of the vast majority of our original settlers have sunk deep roots into the American psyche and are still operative today, as becomes evident when certain (not all) basic moral issues come up for public discussion. The moral consensus is not as broad today as it once was, granted, but it is still quite strong.

Something similar can be said, I think, about the other increasingly secularized European democracies of our time. There is still a deep residue of basic religiosity and age-old Christian moral sensibility at work in them, although now floating free of any particular church or institutional commitment within a publicly secular social framework. What about the experience of the Soviet Union, with its explicit rejection of any religious foundation for its way of life, public morality, etc.² With the collapse of the Soviet political regime, which professed a Marxist atheism and used a totalitarian state to enforce its laws and public morality, it is clear that a serious erosion of public morality took place under the regime, as shown by the rampant corruption and contempt for the common good manifested now at many levels of Russian society.⁵ Still, there seems to have remained a profound residue of the deeply religious spirit in the Russian

soul, as has been shown by the return in large numbers of ordinary people to the practice of their traditional Orthodox Christianity. It remains to be seen what the long-range effect on the former Soviet Union will be, particularly among the young. The situation in China also remains an open question. There may well be a substantial remnant of traditional Confucian morality embedded in the consciousness of the masses. History has not yet recorded its judgment on this remarkable sociopolitical experiment, evolving unpredictably before our eyes.

But suppose now that we were to witness the radical erosion or total eradication of any religious belief in the large majority of people in some democratic society. What then would be the result, in the long run, for such a society? Since we have no experience of any such society, we have no sure way of knowing; we can only speculate, based partly on our experience of the past, partly on our practical knowledge of our flawed human nature, and partly on our analysis of the intrinsic connections between the democratic way of life and a normative code of ethics. The experience of the past seems clear enough. The French Revolution was the first attempt to dispense entirely with religious support or grounding for the viability of a society's political life. The experiment, as we well know, turned out to be a disastrous and short-lived failure, for many reasons, but not least because its explicit rejection of any religiously grounded normative code of ethics produced a situation in which there were no effective restraints on the appetite and thirst for power on the part of the revolution's organizers.

Conclusion

Let us recapitulate now our central claim, and then point out some important implications. Our central claim is that democracy is not a form of government that can maintain itself effectively over the long term through its political resources alone. It needs rather to be inserted in a larger supporting web of human culture within which a normative code of ethics is accepted and practiced (for the most part) by a significant majority of its citizens, and within which some form of religious belief that transcends the human order supports this normative code with its own ultimate moral authority. Democracy, when defined solely as a set of institutional relationships or formal structures, cannot provide this normative authority.

Democracy cannot be rendered viable when it is viewed in purely political terms. Its amalgam of political resources is analogous to the keystone

of an arch. Like that keystone, it needs other supporting stones (that is, a larger cultural framework) to support it. It is a matter not only of honesty but also of basic political wisdom to recognize this, rather than acting as if democracy's cultural framework were somehow dispensable. Democracy as a political way of life makes good sense—perhaps the best sense, all things considered. But it requires a larger human cultural fabric to transcend and support it.

The special merit of Pierre Manent and his school of French Catholic political philosophers is to have presented the careful scholarly evidence, both historical and philosophical (but especially historical) for the conclusions I have reached here—so much so as to win the respect of a wide circle of European scholars, even those outside the Catholic or Christian orbit. They maintain that the evidence for the structural connection I have outlined above is not a matter of any special religious belief or metaphysical postulate, but accessible to any unbiased student of Western political history as being the rule throughout the whole of Western history, for all types of political regimes, but more urgently in the case of democracies.

If what I have argued is indeed the case, then to encourage policies that tend to weaken the strength of a shared normative code of ethics or a supporting shared religious belief is not politically wise. Rather, it automatically tends to weaken the vitality of the democratic way of life. Thus, to interpret the separation of church and state in such a way as to reduce religion to a purely private matter, with no influence on public life or conduct, and to prohibit the teaching in our public education system either of a commonly shared normative code of ethics, or of respect for the latter's religious grounding—all of which we face increasingly today—is to erode the foundations of a healthy democratic way of life. It also by that very fact tends to foster a deeply flawed, unrealistic political philosophy.

What Cannot Be Said in Saint Thomas's Essence-Existence Doctrine

It is common knowledge that the essence-existence doctrine of Saint Thomas is the central piece in his whole metaphysical system. It is a doctrine both of creatures and of God in their mutual relations, the central vantage point from which he views all creatures as participating in limited fashion through their respective essences in the unlimited plenitude of God's own perfection as Subsistent Act of Existence (*Ipsium Esse Subsistens*). Admittedly, too, this profound doctrine is a difficult one. But Saint Thomas himself expounds it with such timeless serenity and simplicity, as though it were the most natural thing in the world to hold, that it is all too easy for us coming after him to miss the extraordinary daring, paradox, and mystery lying at the heart of this metaphysical vision. Oceans of ink have been poured out by later Thomists, explaining with nuanced sophistication just what Saint Thomas is saying and why. But comparatively little has been written about how his teaching in fact stretches the resources of language up to, if not beyond, their limits. It points beyond to something that cannot properly be said, but can only be recognized, not conceptualized, in a flash of synthetic insight.

There is no need to give another detailed exposition of the essence-existence doctrine to readers of this book. Let me recall it in brief summary and proceed at once to its limits. For all metaphysicians, the problem of the one and the many is central. Reality, despite its multiplicity and diversity, still somehow manifests a bond of unity, although the degree and explanations of this unity vary with each thinker. Many metaphysicians explain this bond of unity by "reducing" (in the Thomistic sense of

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drawing back to a ground) the multiplicity to modes of some one central perfection, which all beings participate in diversely, such as unity, goodness, consciousness, matter, etc. For Saint Thomas, in this general tradition, the central perfection of the universe is the very act of existence itself (*esse*). This exists in pure, unlimited plenitude in God alone, who thereby contains all perfections in a supereminent way in His simple concentrated unity. All other beings, created by God, participate in this basic all-inclusive perfection of existence according to the limiting modes of their respective essences. Every being aside from God is thus a limited participation in the perfection of existence, and hence a real metaphysical composition of its particular act of existence and its respective limiting essence, in a relation of act to potency.

This is a participation doctrine, following the same general structure of participation worked out by the Neoplatonic school, with its four basic elements: (1) a single source possessing the perfection in question in unparticipated, unlimited plenitude; (2) the participation or common perfection shared by the source with all its participants; (3) the multiplicity of participants, each participating in its own limited mode according to the capacity of its “receiving” and limited principle; (4) the resulting metaphysical structure or composition in each participant of the participated perfection and its limiting subject or mode, which Saint Thomas himself transposes into the Aristotelian framework of act and potency. But it differs from the Platonic tradition of his predecessors in that it is centered—not around form, or unity, or goodness, as for them—but around the more radical supraformal perfection of existence conceived as basic act or energy (*virtus essendi*). This is how Saint Thomas answers the fundamental problem of all medieval metaphysics: how creatures are both like and unlike God. For him, they are like God in that they all participate in the one fundamental perfection, the act of existence which, in unparticipated plenitude, constitutes the very being of God; they are unlike God because they participate in this universal perfection only in a limited way, according to their respective essences. So much for a brief recapitulation of the doctrine.¹

Unifying Power of the Theory

The first point I would like to call attention to is the remarkable daring and power of this attempt to satisfy the age-old quest to understand the

universe as a truly unified synthesis of the one and the many. In other systems, the ultimate perfection to which all else is reduced is never existence itself but some other content of perfection like goodness, unity, etc. Yet the nagging question always arises in these systems—whether faced explicitly or not—as to just what to do with the embarrassing little “is” (or its equivalent) which always somehow seems to be left over, to resist complete reduction to anything else but itself. Thus the question intrudes itself: are we not forced to say that goodness (or whatever the ultimate perfection is called) *is*, is *real*, actually is present and is not just an ideal or hope or abstraction? It seems that somehow such an affirmation must be made, implicitly or explicitly.

The case of Plotinus is fascinating and instructive. “Being” for him is a technical term always identified (as with Plato) with determinate limited essence, embedded in the network of related intelligible forms which constitutes the world of being. Hence the Supreme Reality, the One or the Good, is properly speaking beyond being (taken as a noun: *to on*). Yet when it is a question of whether or not the verb “is,” as affirming existence (which is not strictly a technical term in his philosophy), can be applied to the One, Plotinus finds himself in a dilemma. On the one hand, he can allow no objective duality of attributes in the One, nothing save pure unity itself, lest its absolute unity be compromised. On the other, he cannot bring himself to accept that one should refuse to affirm of the supremely real and perfect that It is, or, worse, say that It is not. In a kind of metaphysical anguish as to how best to express himself, he wavers back and forth, and finally allows that one must somehow say of the One-Good that “It is.” “But what is This which does not exist? We must go away silent, involved by our thought in utter perplexity.” And yet he concludes, “We must think of Him only as existing (for the necessity of discussion compels us to attribute existence to Him).”² And again, “The only way is to make every denial and no assertion, to feign no quality or content there but to permit only the ‘It is,’ in which we pretend to no affirmation of non-existent attributes.”³ In a word, it is impossible, if we are to say anything at all about the Ultimate, not to say of it that somehow “It is.” The opposite would be worse, and simple silence is not enough (although a Buddhist would question the latter). And even to call It “the Good” is implicitly to affirm “The Good really is, is truly present,” as opposed to unreal, illusion.

But a critical dilemma now follows, not only for Plotinus, but for all who take anything other than existence itself as the ultimate perfection.

We are now faced with an ultimate irreducible duality in the Supreme, at least of concepts and words, to which *something* must correspond in reality: *the Good* and *is*. It is impossible simply to swallow up the *is* without remainder in the Good or in any other attribute. It stubbornly resists complete assimilation or reduction, even Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*). The final intellectual integration of reality into unity thus remains annoyingly unfinished business, unable to dissolve this embarrassing stumbling block of the “is” in “It is.”

What Saint Thomas has done, unique in this among metaphysicians, is to turn the tables completely. If the “is” refuses to be reduced to anything else, then, since duality cannot be the last word, the only alternative is to reverse the picture and reduce all else to the “is.” This is just what his doctrine of essence-existence carries out systematically. Goodness, unity, consciousness, activity—all possible positive attributes—are now all reduced to aspects, functions, modes of the one ultimate all-embracing perfection of existence itself, or the act of radical unqualified presence. Such an intellectual vision of the universe permits a truly ultimate unification of the real, without dissolving its multiplicity and diversity. All the latter, however, are now interpreted, not as the *addition* of something extra to existence, but as diverse modes of participation, through interior *limitation* (that is, partial *negation*), in this one all-inclusive positive “attribute” of existence. I know of no more thoroughgoing, daring, and truly radical metaphysical theory of the unity of reality, short of monism, in Western thought.

Such is the basic thrust of the theory and its significance in the history of metaphysics—if indeed it can be done successfully and survive the disturbing paradoxes which it also generates. We must take a look at these. I shall pick out what I consider to be some of the principal and most fruitful ones.

The Divine Essence as Subsistent Act of Existence

Let us turn first to one of the key pieces in Saint Thomas's essence-existence doctrine: his conception of God as pure Subsistent Act of Existence. The main point of this position—and its peculiar originality—is *not* the assertion that God is a necessary being, that existence belongs of necessity to His essence, so that He cannot not exist. This is true, of course, for Saint Thomas, but it is not his main point, as it is, on the other hand, for

the Anselmian-Scotistic-Suarezian scholastic tradition, continued on in Descartes, Spinoza, and even Kant in his conception of the "traditional" natural theology he opposes. Saint Thomas's point is not that existence belongs necessarily to the divine essence, conceived as already the plenitude of perfection in its own right as essence. It is rather that the entire essence itself of God is *nothing else than* the pure unlimited Act of Existence (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*), which of itself by "nature" contains, at least equivalently, all possible perfections. This is not a reduction of existence to essence, as in the other traditions, but just the opposite: a reduction of essence to existence. This is the truly daring aspect of the doctrine, and the one that has made it so difficult for those in other traditions even to grasp, let alone accept.

But note what has happened here. What Saint Thomas is inviting us to do in describing the essence of God as the Subsistent Act of Existence itself is to transcend the most radical and irreducible distinction of linguistic forms in our language, that between subject (noun) and verb. In a complete linguistic expression (a proposition, expressing an inner act of judgment), subject and verb are indeed complementary and always joined together. But they remain irreducibly distinct. There is no single linguistic expression or concept that can fuse them into a unity of identity. Subjects can never function as their own verbs, expressing in identity of form both the subject and its activity or act of presence, nor can verbs function identically as their own subjects. We always have to use two units, "X is," or "X does such and such." A fusion of the two into linguistic or even conceptual identity would be unsayable and unconceptualizable.

Yet this is exactly what Saint Thomas is asking us to do in naming God as *Ipsum Esse*. It is true that in his expression of the doctrine he is forced to fall back into dual linguistic terms: "The Subsistent Act of Existence is" (*Ipsum Esse est*). There is no other way to say it in language. But what he is *intending* through this very peculiar use of language is the transcending of all duality between subject and verb, not only in the reality intended, but also somehow in our thought which intends it as it is and knows what it is doing, and why it must do so. What his expression is intending in the real order is an utterly simple identity beyond all distinction of subject-verb, essence-existence, *that which is* and the act of *ising*. This identity transcends all language forms and categories, and therefore cannot properly be said in any language, though it can be evocatively suggested by a special use of language and shown forth as something that must be affirmed if reality is to make ultimate sense. Therefore in a very real sense,

the core of Saint Thomas's teaching on the nature of God is something that cannot be directly said at all. This does not prevent language from being used in a way that summons the living thrust of the mind to transcend in a leap of insight the limitations of its own linguistic product, and in that very act somehow to know what it is doing and why, though it cannot further express what it knowingly intends. The last "word" of the doctrine, we might say, is therefore a dimension of eloquent silence.

Now a philosopher's reaction can, of course, be that such an attempt to use human language to transcend itself is by the nature of the case illusory and impossible; hence the doctrinal formulation of such an attempt is meaningless, not really saying anything at all, not even an apt candidate for being judged true or false. Many have made this judgment, and we must respect the genuine intellectual difficulty which motivates it. But let us not settle too quickly for such a surrender. Is it not also true that duality cannot be the last word, either in reality or even in thought, that behind all duality there must be a deeper, more ultimate unity which grounds the very possibility of duality in relation? If so, and I firmly believe with most of the great metaphysicians of East and West that it must be so, then even the apparently ultimate and irreducible duality of subject and verb in language cannot be really ultimate and self-sufficient in intelligibility, but demands to be transcended toward an utterly simple and absolute unity beyond all categories and distinctions, which cannot any longer be expressed but can somehow be known in a flash of intellectual recognition. (Whether such an act of recognition is better called an insight or an exigency of affirmation pointing beyond all direct insight is an apt question for further discussion which we will not enter into here.) The ultimate grounding of the subject-verb relation must be beyond both.

We might now venture a bit further and ask a perhaps imprudent question. In this inexpressible fusion of subject and verb that is the name of God for Saint Thomas, can one term be said in some sense to "win out" over the other, the noun or the verb? Strictly speaking, of course, neither, since the synthesis transcends and includes both at once: the subject becomes pure act of presence and the act of presence becomes itself its own subject, pure subject, ultimate pure subjectivity. Still, I think one might say that in some significant sense the verb finally wins out. The "is" is deeper than the "what." And a sign of this is that Saint Thomas himself chooses a verb form, *esse* (to be), to express the subject in God, and not vice versa.

It is interesting to note in passing the coincidence—is it only that?—that the Hindu Vedanta philosophy of language, inspired of course by its metaphysical vision, explicitly defends the theory that the verb is primary, expressing the bond of unity of all subjects, whereas the various distinct subjects, expressed by nouns, are secondary and derivative, belonging to the world of *maya* (the not fully real) which comes “later.”⁴ Yet it is true for them, too, that the pure act of consciousness, intended by the verb, is also a Self, *the* Self, the ultimate Subject. The similarity here between these two great and independent systems of thought in East and West—despite all their deep remaining differences—is striking.

Participated Existence in Creatures: Is It “Real”?

So much for what cannot be said in Saint Thomas's doctrine of essence and existence as applied to God. Let us turn now to its application to creatures. I would like to focus here not on the endlessly rehashed question of the “real distinction” as such between essence and existence, but rather on the more fundamental and fruitful notion of participated existence itself. As we have seen earlier in our initial summary of the essence-existence doctrine, the notion of participated existence, of the common perfection of existence in all things, is one of the four key elements in the participation framework which Saint Thomas makes use of to expound the metaphysical structure of creatures and their relation to God. Expressions such as, “All creatures participate existence,” *ens commune*, and the like, are too numerous and commonplace to need detailed documentation.⁵ Now if this participation doctrine is to express an objective structure in reality itself—and this is surely the case with Saint Thomas himself—then “participated existence,” “the common perfection of existence,” etc., must refer to something in the real order and not merely a logical construct; and what it expresses must also be somehow objectively one, since this is the basic bond of unity which grounds the similarity of all creatures with each other and with God, and makes of things a single, unified order of reality, a *universe*.

But as soon as we try to press this notion of participated existence further and pin down with precision just what its objective reality and unity are, we find ourselves at a loss. It seems to slip through our fingers and elude all description. For participated existence is not a concrete real being in its own right; otherwise it would merely be another singular being

alongside the others, and not be participated in or common to all. What is common to all cannot be another one among them. Hence it is not itself a real being, nor a concrete real part of any real being. Nor, on the other hand, can it be simply nonbeing, simply unreal, a mere logical construct. Hence it turns out to be neither being nor nonbeing, neither one nor many! What a nest of paradoxes we have landed in! Or merely a linguistic muddle, the result of questions involving a category mistake?

The reader will not fail to note that this difficulty is not limited to the notion of participated existence as a unique case. It can be immediately generalized to include all cases of ontological participation, such as participation in a specific form (man, humanity) or quality (redness), etc. It is the old problem of the ontological status of universal predicates all over again. The only difference is that the difficulty becomes even more critical in the case of participated existence, since existence does not even have the formal unity of an intelligible form.

The solution of Wittgenstein and other linguistic analysts to this paradox is a simple and drastic one. You simply should not ask this kind of question. To predicate the same predicate, whether existence or anything else, of many singular subjects, as ordinary language does, is perfectly normal usage and will lead to no philosophical paradoxes. It is only when you divert language from its ordinary channels and start asking questions about the reality of predicates themselves that troubles arise. But this is a misuse of language, "language going on a holiday," spinning idly in a vacuum. You can properly ask, "Is this or that real? Are dogs or cats real?" But you can't properly ask, "Is humanity or redness real?" Predicates just can't function as subjects in this way.

I am quite willing to admit that in asking this kind of metaphysical question we are not using language in its ordinary first-order mode of speech about the world. We have moved back to a metalanguage level and are reflecting on the ontological underpinnings of thought and language itself. And I admit also that one must be very careful about how one asks such questions and what kind of answers one expects or will accept. But it still seems to me that our radical drive toward total intelligibility, which involves bringing all of our taken-for-granted presuppositions out into the light of critical consciousness as far as possible, cannot remain satisfied with merely taking the successful working of language as a brute fact, and not reflecting in depth on the very roots of its possibility. Hence I think it is still legitimate to ask, cautiously, the metalanguage philosophical questions, such as, "What is the ontological status, or status in being, of what

is signified by universal predicates such as human nature, existence, etc.?" Participation theory is an attempt to provide such a metaphysical underpinning, and hence it too should be open for such radical questionings about its own elements.

Another well known and equally radical answer to such questions has been provided by William of Ockham and the nominalist-empiricist tradition. Everyone admits, Ockham says, that Plato and Socrates are truly similar, and hence each can truly be called a man. But the error of all his predecessors in the participation tradition—he is thinking particularly of Duns Scotus and other Platonists of his day, although his critique partially hits Saint Thomas too—is that they were misled by the form of language to conclude that if Plato and Socrates are really similar, they must be similar *in* something real, such as humanity, etc. Ockham rejects entirely both this manner of speaking and the theories behind it. Plato and Socrates are indeed really similar. But they are not similar *in* anything real. They are just simply similar, and that's the end of it. They are not similar *in* anything, save of course in the mind, in the one concept that can represent them both.⁶

It is clear that this position, with all its apparent clarity, is laden with its own grave problem: an objective similarity left as a mere brute fact with no further grounding in reality, save the enigmatic further assertion by Ockham that by some natural process, hidden from us, our minds naturally form one identical concept capable of standing for these simply multiple similar things. And this is in principle the end of any philosophical explanation possible—really little more than a restatement of the facts. But this is clearly not enough for most of us.

If one is not content with this radical empiricist dissolution of the problem, then the only other alternative is some form of ontological participation doctrine. This could be a strong Platonic realism, either the naive kind of early medieval thinkers, or the more subtle variety of Duns Scotus, with his "common nature," which posits an objective dimension in reality which is real in itself and not merely in the mind, yet not singular, though it cannot exist apart from singulars. It occupies a real middle ground between the singular and the formally universal; it is, in fact, a lineal descendant of Avicenna's "absolute nature" that is in itself neither singular nor universal but simply is what it is (humanity, or equinity, or whiteness) in its own peculiar being as eternal intelligible essence independent of being thought about by any mind.

Saint Thomas will accept none of these brands of strong realism as to what is signified by the universal. His position lies precisely between that of nominalism and strong realism. One affirms too little; the other too much. For, despite the apparently serene and unquestioning objectivity with which he habitually speaks of "participated existence" and the like, when an objection is brought against him as to where the unity of this "one" perfection lies, he calmly replies that participated existence, considered precisely as *one*, exists only in the mind!⁷ What then is its existence, in its unity, in things themselves?

Saint Thomas is consistently—and many would say, wisely—reticent about this point. He simply will not talk about participated existence as isolated in itself, but only as an element in a complex whole. It seems that there is something in a quite real and objective participation-situation (real and objective as an indivisible whole) which eludes being further pinned down in language or concept. It cannot be directly said, but can only be understood, or, perhaps better, recognized, in the course of reflecting on the whole dynamic process of participation at once: namely, a real source, sharing actively its own real perfection, which is truly one in its source, with many different participants, so that because of this real communication all the participants are objectively similar to each other and to their source. Thus real participation turns out to be a kind of "natural mystery." It contains a core that is somehow real, of the real order, yet cannot be properly said in any of our forms of language, because it seems to transcend our conceptually and linguistically unbridgeable distinctions between one and many, singular-concrete, and universal-abstract.

Lest it be thought that such strange metaphysical paradoxes inhabit only the weird and alien world of metaphysicians and other dreamers, let me quickly point out that we are dealing constantly with similar natural mysteries in our ordinary experience, lulled into taking them for granted simply because we have grown so accustomed to them. Take a photograph. I make two copies from the same negative, give one to you and hold the other myself. Now suppose I ask: "Is the photo you have the same as mine?" Suppose you answer yes. "Nonsense," I can reply, tearing up the one I have. Suppose, on the other hand, you say no. Then I can respond, "You mean to say that is not the same picture on these two photos?" Thus, when asked whether the two copies of a photo are the same or not, we must answer that they are *both* the same and not the same, under different aspects. And when asked to specify more precisely in *what* they are the same (or similar), we find ourselves at a loss to pin down its reality and

unity any further in language. There is no use getting annoyed and saying, "Let's clear up this matter once and for all: either they are the same or they are not; which is it?" It is always both. One-many participation in endlessly varied forms is the most common stuff of our universe. But it is no less a thing of wonder for being so ubiquitous.

We might leave the matter here as a kind of natural mystery, something that is somehow "there," but cannot directly be said. But I suggest we may be able to get behind it a little more and, while not doing away with the element of mystery, at least render it less opaque by rooting it in a more luminous and accessible mystery. In this effort I shall be following the lead opened by Saint Thomas when he asserts that a participated, precisely as *one*, exists only in the mind. What I propose is that the ultimate root and explanation of the unity of any participated perfection, and in particular of participated existence (where the problem becomes most acute), lies in the creative *intentional act* of its source, precisely as *intentional* (using "intentional" here in its technical Thomistic sense of the intentionality of an act of consciousness). By this I mean the conscious intentional act of thinking-willing of its intelligent cause, by which the latter efficaciously wills to share its own perfection, one in its source, with many participants; and I mean this act conjoined with its inseparable ontological complement, the effective execution or outcome of this act in the real world, which we recognize as participation-accomplished.

The only kind of reality in the universe—and of course it is not properly a thing but a unique kind of act—which has the peculiar property of joining together in the unity of a single act both one and many, singular and universal, is an intentional act, which either intends actively to share a one with many, or *post factum* recognizes such a sharing when executed. (The latter, of course, is our case, as receptive knowers and reconstituters of a world already in existence, although the human artist and artisan imitates the former constitutive role of intentionality analogously in the case of artifacts. But the former, the creative act, is primary, since without it there would be nothing for us to recognize or reconstitute.) For such an act intends all three together: (1) the one source with its perfection as model or exemplar, (2) the many as recipients or participants, and (3) the actual sharing of the one perfection of the source with the many, diversely in each. Such an efficacious act of intentionality, of willing-to-share, of willed self-communication, is the only possible ultimate ground, both of being and intelligibility, for the one-many unity of participation as an accomplished existential fact.

The existential being of the source and its creative act remain, of course, outside of this accomplished participation in the many. But the unity of its intention, precisely *as intention* to share a one-with-many, somehow carries over into each of the participants and is incarnated there under the sign of ontological similarity, waiting to be picked up and formally reconstituted in its original unity by a mind capable of recognizing the sign for what it points to. Without rooting such a one-many synthesis in the original creative intentional act, objective ontological participation could indeed be recognized by us as a fact. But it would remain opaque and lacking full intelligibility, like seeing only half of a painting, with the other half veiled. The power of intentional consciousness, the conscious and efficacious act of willing to share one's own riches with others, is thus the ultimate reason and ground of both intelligibility and being for the universe precisely *as universe*, as one world, as a unified order of reality.⁸

Real participation is thus, in the last analysis, an indivisible two-poled dynamic whole: the one-many unity of the creative intentional act, on the one side, and the ontological reflection of this intention in the real similarity of things to each other and their source, on the other, apt to be recognized and reconstituted by a receptive mind after the fact. This entire situation can only, or perhaps best, be expressed in objective participation language—so far we have found nothing better short of nominalism—as long as one understands what this language is trying to signify. But it is still true that, literally speaking, considered purely on its ontological side independent of the constitutive intention at its source, there *is* no such thing as participated existence (or any other participated perfection) as either real or one in itself in things. Although participation language may be the best we can do, there is still a limit to what this or any language form can say. At the heart of real participation lies something which cannot properly be said, although it can be recognized in a single synthetic intellectual insight as to “what’s going on” in the world.

It may be objected, of course, that the above “solution” only pushes the mystery back one step further into that of the special character of the intentional act itself, with its unique ability to transcend and synthesize between one and many, singular and universal. Quite true. But at least we have tracked down the mystery to its ultimate root; and this root is a considerably more luminous mystery, because in an analogous way immediate and accessible to us in our life of consciousness, where we are constantly “doing the participation thing” in our own way, both passively and also actively. And is it not as it should be that the truly ultimate mystery

of the universe, that which illumines all else, should turn out to be the mystery of self-communicating love? There *is* no further explanation possible for anything, if “God *is* Love,” as Saint John says.

The “Reality” of Essence as Limit

The last point in the essence-existence doctrine of Saint Thomas which I shall briefly examine is the notion of essence as limit, or principle of limitation, of the act of existence. Before getting to this point, however, let me call attention to two significantly different interpretations of the so-called “traditional” Thomistic doctrine of the essence-existence composition in all finite beings. I am not speaking here of the older, pre-existentialist phase of interpretation as found in the great commentators, where existence is conceived more as a kind of extrinsic act coming to actualize the positive perfection potentially inherent in essence itself. Existence is conceived more as the actualizing principle of the perfection of another, essence, than as itself the total source and “residing place” of all the positivity and perfection in the being. This interpretation, though not strictly unfaithful to Saint Thomas, reflects the early, more Avicennian phase of his thought and language on the subject, which gradually shifts in his middle and late works to a more explicit awareness of existence as the unique source of all perfection and to the expression of the essence-existence relation in terms of an intrinsic participation structure. But even in the contemporary existentialist interpretation, now almost universally accepted since the work of Gilson, Geiger, Fabro, and de Finance, there are still two ways of looking at the nature and role of essence. In one, essence is still looked on as possessing a certain positivity of its own, received indeed from existence as ultimate act, but giving it a distinct positive role of its own, precisely *as distinct* from the act of existence, so that the essence becomes the positive *subject which* exists, distinct as positive subject from the act of existence which it exercises. This has been called colloquially the “thick-essence” view.⁹

The “thin-essence” view, on the other hand, follows out, it seems to me, with more thoroughgoing rigor and consistency the insight of Saint Thomas that all perfection resides in the act of existence itself. Existence is now seen, not so much as the actualizer of anything positive other than itself, but rather as the whole inner core of all the perfection the being contains. Essence, in its turn, becomes nothing but the interior limiting

principle, the inner limit or partial negation (*omnis determinatio est negatio*, as Spinoza put it in his classic phrase) of the perfection which resides properly within the act of existence itself. The act of existence, accordingly, *as thus limited*, becomes the very subject which exists. The complete finite being, therefore, might more accurately be described, not as "This essence, this person, exists," but "There is an existent here according to this limited mode (essence), the human mode, the canine mode, etc."

Whatever the textual evidence may be—and it does not seem to me decisive—I personally prefer, as a metaphysician, the "thin-essence" view of essence as a more streamlined and rigorously consistent following-out of the implications of Saint Thomas's breakthrough to existence as perfection. But there is no doubt that this "thin-essence" view, whatever its ultimate advantages for a radical metaphysical unification of the universe, raises the most troubling problems of how to talk about it. How can a purely negative, limiting principle (every limit is a partial negation conjoined with, or modifying, a positive affirmation) enter into "real composition with, be really distinct from," the act of existence, in which all the positivity of the being resides? To open up the question all the way, what is the being, the reality of limit as such? Beings are "really limited." But what is the reality of the limit within them?

My first response is that on this view one must indeed tone down rather drastically the "reality" and solidity of the so-called "real distinction"—a strong expression which, as is well known, is only used rarely by Thomas himself. He prefers "other and other" (*aliud et aliud*). To my mind, the essential point truly worth holding onto in the doctrine of Saint Thomas is the notion of *limited participation* in the central perfection of existence, not the technical solution of how to express this, whether by "real distinction," or some other way.

But let us face squarely the main question: what is the reality of limit as such? Here, I think, is another case where we have reached the limits of language. Either path we take lands us into paradox. Suppose we say the limit is real as distinct from what it limits. But what can be the reality in itself of that whose only role is to partially negate? On the other hand, suppose we say the limit as such is not real. Then how can we say that this being is "really limited"? There would be nothing here but the simple act of existence with no intrinsic limiting principle within it independently of our thinking about it in comparison with others. Neither way of speaking is satisfactory. What does remain, however, is the intractable irreducibility of both elements that are required to think and speak correctly about any

finite being: “perfection” and “limited.” There is no way of fusing these two concepts and terms in some single, simpler “something,” or principle, or what have you. Is this ultimate irreducibility in our concepts and language, which must be intending something objective and irreducible in the thing itself, enough to justify the traditional formulation as “real distinction”? Perhaps, but I believe that here again we have reached the limits of language. To see beings as really limited is part of a synoptic vision of reality as a whole. To try and lay hold of the being of limit as such exceeds the limits of language and conceptual thought. It may then be wiser to rest content with the couplets “limited-participation,” “limited-perfection.” To seek to analyze further is to seek to say what cannot be said.

To sum up, the essence-existence doctrine of Saint Thomas contains at least three elements which cannot be said directly in language, though they can be recognized by the mind in an act of language-transcending insight: (1) the name of God as Subsistent Act of Existence, transcending the ultimate linguistic distinction of subject and verb; (2) the being of participated existence, or any participated perfection, as somehow truly in its participants and unifying them, yet neither existing nor one in itself save in the mind; hence somehow transcending or bridging over the distinction between one and many—intelligible finally only in the light of the unity of the original creative intentional act of the source as willing to share its perfection with many; and (3) the being of essence as limit in the indissoluble yet irreducible unity-duality-whole that is limited-being, limited-perfection. In an important sense, then, what cannot be said in the Thomistic essence-existence doctrine is almost, if not equally, as important as what can be said. Must not the last word of metaphysical—as well as any other—wisdom be the eloquence of silence? Did not Saint Thomas himself say, “*Omnia exeunt in mysterium*”?

Living on the Edge: The Human Person as “Frontier Being” and Microcosm

The aim of this paper is to propose a creative “retrieval” of an interconnected pair of very ancient—but I still think very rich and seminal—ideas of what it means to be a human being and have a place in the cosmos. These ideas have nourished reflective human thought for centuries in the past, but like so many such ideas they seem to have dropped out of focal awareness in our own day, partly because of the collapse of all utopian visions of the human race, owing to our twentieth-century experiences of irrational violence, and partly because the predominance of the scientific view has flattened out our world vision to a single this-worldly dimension of physico-chemical and biological forces where spirit has been banished either as unreal or as inaccessible.

The first of this pair of ideas is that of the human person as a “frontier being,” living on the edge, on the frontier, between matter and spirit, time and eternity. The diverse pulls of these apparently conflicting dimensions within a human person create tension for it, while it freely shifts its conscious focus between these dimensions, either upward or downward, toward the pole of spirit or the pole of body. The idea of a human as a frontier being surfaced first in Plato, was further developed by the Neoplatonic tradition, and then was taken over by the Greek Christian Fathers and other early Christian thinkers, with appropriate adaptations to fit the Christian revaluation of the body. It was picked up again by medieval thinkers, quite explicitly by Saint Thomas, and then continued to pop up here and there throughout later Western thought and spirituality.

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The second idea is that of the human person as "microcosm," or small cosmos, the cosmos in miniature. A human person unites in itself all the levels of the universe from the depths of matter to the transcendence of spirit and is capable of union with God himself and thereby mirroring the unity of the cosmos itself. While the Platonic tradition used the "frontier being" concept to warn of the lowliness and precariousness of the human condition in the hierarchy of reality, the early Christian thinkers transformed the concept to celebrate the great dignity and glory of the human person as central piece, or "lynchpin," of the universe—a piece more central in God's plan even than the angels, as some Christian thinkers, including Saint Thomas, went so far as to say. This seminal idea of "man the microcosm" then became one of the primary inspirations of Renaissance thought and art, yet it seems to have slowly faded from prominence in later modern thought for reasons which we shall later suggest.

As I trace the history of these interconnected ideas, I shall be interested less in textual and historical details than in the content of the ideas themselves and their transformation through the history of Western thought. I shall conclude with some striking evidence from recent scientific studies of the brain, which tend to confirm and supply biological underpinning for the idea of the human being as a frontier being, "living on the edge." It turns out that the history of these ideas, especially that of microcosm, is a long, rich, and complex one, impossible to cover adequately in a single brief chapter. So I hope I will be pardoned for painting in large, broad strokes as I present the highpoints of this history and its significance, from the beginning of Western thought up to the Renaissance, with indications of its later developments.¹

The Human Person as Frontier Being

The idea first surfaces clearly in Plato, in the *Timaeus* 35A, for example, where he describes the human soul as a "middle being" situated between the pure upper world of soul and ideas and the lower world of matter and body, linking the two but also pulled in opposite directions by both. In fact, it took a lot of energy, even violence, for the Demiurge, the divine Creator of this cosmos, to put these two together, "compressing together by force these alien and unsociable elements," body and soul. Thus the soul lives in uneasy tension while in the body; it is not an easy task for the upper rational part of the soul to hold the composite together in harmony.

Plato symbolizes this graphically by his image of the soul as a charioteer driving two horses: one horse looks upward toward the world of Ideas, guided by reason; the other, guided by irrational appetites, looks toward the earth and so is unruly and difficult to control. On coming close to bodily beauty the unruly horse plunges madly ahead, stampedes; the chariot goes out of control and the whole thing, chariot, horses, and charioteer, crashes down to earth, where the rational soul is imprisoned for a time in the body, in alien territory, so to speak, until it can return home to its native world of spirit.²

Two things are to be noted here. One is that it is the *soul* that is the middle being, not the whole composite of body and soul, since for Plato the soul *is* the human person, the true self of the human being, temporally imprisoned in the body. The second and central point is that the human condition, this middle state joining the spiritual and material worlds, eternity and time, is a lowly and precarious one in the order of true being. Plato's idea is not put forward to show the honor and dignity of a human person as the center of the universe, as we shall see later, but to warn humans about how to live without becoming lost in this alien world of matter, permanently stuck in their prison.

Next we come to Plotinus and the Neoplatonic tradition. Here the idea of the human as a frontier being takes on much sharper and more explicit form. Plotinus speaks of the human *soul* (like Plato) as "living on the edge," the "frontier" (*methorion*), between matter and spirit, time and eternity. This frontier is described very insightfully, however, as a border that both separates and unites (*meta*-horion). And the center of gravity of this composite being, the "location" of the frontier point, is not fixed but movable; it can shift upward toward the spiritual world so that even while living in the body, our focus will be on the spiritual world of the eternal ideas above, the world of the divine Intelligence (*Nous*); or it can shift downward toward the world of matter so that our focus is on life in the body with its sense pleasures, etc. According to what we love most, we can live either as a spiritual being or as a carnal, animal one:

It [the soul] is of the boundary order (*methorion*) between two regions, and has tendency to both.³

The soul, lying so to speak on the borders of the Intellectual Realm, is amenable to change.⁴

[Souls plunged in matter can reconvert to the Intellectual.] Souls that take this way have place in both spheres, living of necessity the life there and the life

here by turns, the upper life reigning in those able to consort more continuously with the divine Intellect, the lower dominant where character or circumstances are less favorable.⁵

Thus the human soul is the "traveler" of the universe. All the other kinds of being are fixed by nature in their paths; only the human soul can choose to be, to live, on whatever level it wishes, from total absorption in matter to the highest spiritual union with the One. The human soul is truly a being that "lives on the edge," on the frontier, between matter and spirit, time and eternity. A fragile and precarious being indeed!

But note again that as in Plato it is the *soul* that is the frontier being, that lives on the edge; and this special human condition is not put forward as the glory and dignity of the human being but rather as a *lowly* and *precarious state*, against the perils of which we humans must be warned. Our human journey can be a bad trip or a good one.

Closely connected with this idea of the human being as a "middle being," especially in Plato, is the insight, so typical of the Greek genius, that this human being should know its place in the universe and stick to it, not try to exceed in either direction: that is, not to be filled with arrogant pride and think that he or she is above the human, a god, nor below the human and just one of the animals. Rather, the human being is right in the middle and should act accordingly. Werner Jaeger, the great Aristotle scholar, has declared that in his opinion "the profoundest intuition which the Greek mind achieved and expresses is this conception of the human as common boundary between animal and divine existence, the middle of the cosmos, neither raising himself in hubris to a superhuman existence, nor debasing his life in an attitude of cynicism, but revolving in the vital spheres to which man is bound by natural law."⁶ I am not sure I would go that far, to say that this is their profoundest intuition, but it is certainly a central one.

The Human Person as Microcosm

We pass now into the world of Christian thought, with the Greek Fathers of the Church, not a few of whom had been educated in the Neoplatonic academies. The same basic idea of the human person as a frontier being, living on the edge of time and eternity, matter and spirit, was assimilated easily enough into Christian thought, with similar ethical implications

such as the need to discipline the body and put it at the service of the soul, to be aware of the Pauline conflict between living according to the spirit and living according to the flesh (although the "flesh" in Paul does not have quite the same ontological meaning as "body" for the Greeks). The difficulty of harmonizing body and soul together, especially since original sin, has been and will always remain an intrinsic component of Christian thought.

This same basic idea, however, now proceeds to expand into quite a new direction once it has been situated in the new light of Christian revelation with its revaluation of the meaning and dignity of the human body as good in itself and as a permanent partner of the human soul in this life and the next. Here it merges into the old idea of "man the microcosm," already present in pre-Christian Greek and Roman thought, so that the latter takes on a whole new richness.

Let us first take a quick look at the pre-Christian history of this notion of "man the microcosm." Although closely allied with the notion of "frontier being," it is considerably richer in its meaning and implications. Because of the fecundity of this idea and its capacity to develop in several different directions, its history is particularly complex; so we will note just the high spots. The idea (if not the word) of the human being as "microcosm," or small cosmos, an image in miniature of the "macrocosm," or large cosmos, begins very early in Greek thought. John Burnet attributes it to Heraclitus, but the text he quotes seems rather to be a later report on the latter's doctrine: "Man is made of three things, fire, water, and earth. But just as in the macrocosm fire is identified with the one wisdom, so in the microcosm the fire alone is conscious."⁷ Something close to the idea also seems to be found in Anaximander, for whom the cosmos mirrors the human political order of justice, the various elements being kept within their appointed bounds by "justice" and "retribution" if they exceed these limits. Or is it the human political world that mirrors the cosmic? The symbol can move either way, as it in fact does, either toward the anthropocentric model or the cosmocentric. With Pythagoras comes in the notion of "harmony" as a central factor in the cosmos (harmony of the spheres, etc.), which is to be echoed analogously in miniature in the human being: harmony in the body, harmony in the soul, harmony in their working together, harmony in our social relations, and intellectual harmony with the cosmos as a whole. Once introduced, this seminal idea of the similarity of the human being to the cosmos becomes a significant and abiding element in Greek thought all through its subsequent history.

Plato, as we have said, quite explicitly expressed the concept of the human being as "middle being," joining together in the human soul the extremes of the spiritual and material world. This leads naturally into the notion of microcosm, and Plato certainly has the idea and makes use of it, though not, as far as I can see, the word itself explicitly. Thus the World Soul, with its wise ordering and governance of the cosmos, is seen as the archetype of the human soul with its mission to order and govern wisely its own body and the life of the soul within it.⁸ Still, I feel there is a block in Platonic thought against getting too enthusiastic about this idea and carrying it too far because of the radical break of transcendence and discontinuity between all lower beings and ideas and the supreme One and Good, above all being and essence, which are the source of both thought and being, as Plato says in the *Republic*, and impossible to express adequately in human language or thought, as he tells us in his *Seventh Epistle*. The notion of "middle being" does seem to me more central and emphasized in his thought, and what it highlights is not so much the dignity and grandeur of the human as its lowly and precarious position as balanced on the frontier between time and eternity, matter and spirit.

The same thing can be said in general, it seems to me, of the Neoplatonic tradition. The idea and term of microcosm is certainly present there, as part of the Greek heritage of thought, more so in the later Neoplatonists it seems. The whole emanation theory, where each lower level of being mirrors the higher, though less perfectly, implies in a certain way the human as microcosm in the middle. But the other side of the picture—the strong break in continuity in the great chain of being owing to the radical transcendence of the One-Good and to the resulting negative theology as regards our ability to speak of the One and apply positive attributes to it—puts brakes on too comprehensive a use of the term with regard to anything in the finite world. The status of the human being as frontier being, living on the edge between time and eternity, is stressed even more explicitly and centrally than in Plato, with its warning to us of our lowly and precarious position in the hierarchy of being.

Aristotle is well aware of the notion of the human being as microcosm since he compares briefly the microcosm to the macrocosm in one text.⁹ But in contrast to the Platonic tradition, he seems more interested in developing the epistemological side of the notion rather than the ontological. Since the human mind has the capacity to know all things and so become them in the cognitive order, the more one comes to know the

macrocosm, the more one carries within one's mind a second cosmos, a cognitive replica of the larger, ontological one.

We come now to early Christian thought, in particular the Greek tradition represented by the Greek Fathers of the Church and others. Here the notion of the human person as microcosm takes on new momentum, energized by some creative, new adaptations coming from the Christian worldview, inspired principally by the new, more positive valuation given to the human body and to the whole material world along with it in Christian revelation. Now the body is no longer something to be looked down upon, to be escaped from and left behind as soon as possible. The creation story of Genesis describes God's own creation of the material world and the human body as something that he looked upon and "saw that it was very good." So it now has its own value and dignity given it by God himself, though at the service of the spiritual soul. In context of the New Testament the body takes on a special dignity. The body was assumed by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity when he took on our human nature as his own in Jesus Christ, born of a woman like us, God made man. At the death of Jesus it was not discarded but raised up in a glorified, spiritualized, profoundly transformed mode of being but still human, bodily, not an angel; and it will now endure forever with him in the glory of his Father and the Holy Spirit. And the same will happen for those who are incorporated into Jesus by baptism as adopted children of God. Since the body is now a permanent and valued part of God's plan for creation, the human person now becomes a microcosm in a new and richer sense than in the Platonic tradition: it incorporates into itself all the levels of the universe and all its values, stretching from the lowest levels of the material universe all the way up to the highest spiritual level, the divine itself, because of our God-given capacity now for direct personal union with its Creator in the beatific vision in heaven. All come together in a new unity in a single type of being, the human person, who now becomes the center or middle point, the "middle being," of the universe in a new, enhanced sense. And notice that this is no longer just as soul, as in Platonism, but as the *whole human person*, body and soul together, embodied spirit. The language shift is striking in these Christian thinkers. It is now, both in the East and in the West, the *anthropos*, the *homo*, not just the *psyche*, the *anima*, that is described as a microcosm.

Another distinctive feature of the Christian interpretation of microcosm now emerges. Not only does the human person integrate within itself all the levels of the universe, but in particular it binds together into

one the two great disparate dimensions of reality, the material and the spiritual worlds, which were so much at odds with each other in the Platonic universe. The world of matter gathered together in its highest form in the human body is no longer something to be rejected and left behind as soon as possible. It is now to be positively integrated with, taken up into, the world of spirit, to be its servant and distinctive human medium of expression—in symbol, art, ritual, etc. The human person now becomes the bond, the nodal point, that gathers together the whole universe into unity. It thus becomes the symbol and expression of the *unity of the whole of creation* and so of the unity of God, its Creator. Only a human being can do this, partaking as it does of both extremes, matter and spirit, and integrating them into unity within itself. Thus the human person becomes truly the center of the universe, more central in God's plan—some of the Greek Fathers and even Saint Thomas were not afraid to say—even than the angels (who are still higher in the order of being). This is true first in the natural order; but it becomes even more manifest in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, where God takes on our human nature as the God-man, Jesus Christ, to whom even the angels bow down in adoration. It seems, then, that this idea of the human as the bond of unity and the witness to the unity of all creation and of its Maker is a distinctively Christian contribution to the conception of the microcosm, rich though this was in its pre-Christian form.

Another significant consequence follows from the above. If the human person is the bond uniting the material world to the spiritual, then it can also be the *mediator* between the two. By lifting up the material world, which is an intrinsic part of itself, into consciousness, it can also offer it back to God, its ultimate Source, with understanding, gratitude, and love. Since the material world cannot perform this act for itself, the human person becomes the mediator between the whole material world and its Creator, enabling it through him to complete its own return to God in the Great Circle of Being that pours out from God in creation and then strives, drawn by the pull of the Good, to find its way back home to him again. Thus the human person in virtue of its very nature as embodied spirit becomes the *high priest*, the *pontifex* (bridge builder), of this whole material cosmos. If this is true even in the natural order, how much does not this become enhanced when God himself takes on our human nature in Jesus, who becomes *the* definitive High Priest for all humanity and through us for the whole material creation! Only someone who is a human being could do this service of mediation, and only one who partakes of

both sides of the God-creation frontier can ultimately mediate with full adequacy between the whole of creation and its Creator.

The perspectives opened up here are rich, reaching far beyond the original pre-Christian Greek vision of the human being as microcosm. From all this results a new vision of the grandeur and dignity of what it means to be human; and the Greek Fathers do not hesitate to celebrate to the full this glory of man. As Saint Irenaeus puts it in his famous adage, "*Gloria Dei, vivens homo*" ("The glory of God is the fully alive human being").¹⁰ They do not forget or deny that the human being is a "frontier being," but for them (more so than in the West, dominated by Saint Augustine with his more pessimistic view of the human) the dignity and glory of the human far outweigh and outshine its lowliness and precariousness. Thus the kindred idea of the frontier being, living on the edge, has now shifted its center of gravity too and become a sign more of dignity, opportunity, and mission than of lowliness, precariousness, and danger.

Let us now look directly at some of the characteristic texts expressing the world view synthesized above.

Understand that you have within yourself, upon a small scale, a second universe: within you there is a sun, there is a moon, and there are also stars.¹¹

You are a universe. Look within you and see there the whole creation.¹²

Wishing to form a single creature from two levels, from both invisible and visible nature, the Creator Logos fashioned man. Taking a body from the matter that he had previously created, and placing in it the breath of life that comes from himself, which Scripture terms the intelligent soul and the image of God, he formed man as a second cosmos, a great universe (*macrocosmos*) within a little one (*microcosmos*).¹³

Hence, Gregory of Nazianzen goes on, each person is first of all an *imago mundi* (image of the world) but even more, with a much higher dignity, an *imago Dei* (image of God).

Nemesius of Emesa, "the first Christian psychologist," in his most famous work *De Natura Hominis* (*On the Nature of Man*, long believed to be a writing of Gregory of Nyssa), a sophisticated synthesis of Plato, Aristotle, and then current medical teaching in a Christian context, greatly influenced later Latin thinkers, including Saint Thomas:

And so God fitted together musically all things and gathered together and forced into one both the intellectual and the visible by the medium of the

generation of man . . . And so it is that man joins together both natures, animal and man [which ensures, he goes on to say, that the unity of the universe reflects the unity of its Creator].¹⁴

Who therefore will worthily admire the nobility of this animal [man], which joins in itself the mortal to the immortal, the rational to the irrational, and bears in its own nature the image of all creation, wherefore it has been called a little world [*microcosmos*], which has been given so great a dignity by divine Providence. It is for the sake of it that all things exist, both the things that are now and the things that will be; it is for its sake that God became man . . . and that, made to the image and likeness of God, he converses with Christ, is a son of God, and presides over every principality and power.¹⁵

Maximus the Confessor, one of the most influential and philosophically sophisticated of the Greek writers, has this to say:

Man is a laboratory [*ergasterion*], a workshop, that contains everything in a most comprehensive fashion, and by virtue of his nature mediates through himself between all the extreme points at all the various levels of division . . . He has by nature full power to unite all these divisions, because in the different aspects of his own self he is himself related to all the extreme points and mediates between them all. It is thus his appointed task to make manifest in himself the great mystery of the divine intention—to show how the divided extremes in created things can be reconciled in harmony, the near with the far, the lower with the higher, so that through gradual ascent all are eventually brought into union with God. That is why man was introduced last into creation, as a natural bond of unity [*syndesmos physikos*], mediating between the extremes because related to them all through the different aspects of his own self . . . drawing them all to unity within himself, and so uniting them all to God as their cause.¹⁶

Thus, he goes on, we first transcend the division of matter and spirit within ourselves, then male and female, finally creation and Creator, all by the power of love (*agape*). Hence the human being is the natural bond of all creation.

I shall skip more briefly through the Latin tradition, which picked up the idea of the human being as microcosm from the Greek tradition and passed it down to the medieval Christian tradition through various channels, for example, Seneca, Chalcidius's Commentary on the *Timaeus*, Macrobius, Eriugena, etc. Saint Augustine certainly knew of it and mentions it with approval in his *City of God*¹⁷ although it does not play a central role in his thought. He was more concerned, it seems, with emphasizing the

human as redeemed sinner than with celebrating the human's glory and dignity. When the idea was passed on to the medievals, it awakened great enthusiasm, for their active imagination loved such symbolic associations. Robert Grosseteste, for example, even wrote a small treatise on it, entitled *Quod Homo Sit Minor Mundus* (*That Man Is a Miniature World*), in which the luxuriant medieval imagination tries to trace out a detailed correlation of the parts of the human body to the parts of the physical cosmos: for example, the hair of a man or woman corresponds to the grass and trees on the earth, the blood coursing in their veins to rivers flowing on earth and to the element of water, their breath to the element of air, the vital heat to the element of fire, the head to the heavens, the two eyes to the sun and moon, the stomach to the ocean, etc.¹⁸

But Grosseteste was also well aware of the rich metaphysical and theological tradition of the Greek Fathers and deliberately set about integrating it into the Western theological tradition. In his *De Confessione*, a manual for priests, he sums up in one splendid text the whole medieval vision of the human being as microcosm, the same that inspired Saint Bonaventure, Saint Thomas, and others (though somewhat exaggerated in its expression here).

In the last place the All-high established a product, man, who would be at once the exemplar of all [the grades] mentioned and drawn from them all, as one might do who wrote individual works containing his wisdom and then edited them into a *summa*. For man is on the same level as the angel in his soul, his sensibility relates him to the animals, and he shares his lowest organic level with all growing things, while certain parts of his body bear a likeness to other material things. In his physical aspect, therefore, he resembles the most lowly of things and so is imperfect, but his soul is equal of the highest creature and hence most noble. Taken in all of what he is, however, he is the most worthy creature that exists. For I maintain that man resembles the Creator more than does any other thing made, for as all things stand in God as their cause, so too all shine forth in man as their effect, which is why he is called a tiny world. And since he is the best of all, being equal to all together yet equalled by none, they commonly owe him natural obedience; so he is the image of God. The Lord said, "Let us make man in our image and likeness." He gave him dominion over all things, for man had been conceived as the model of the universe.¹⁹

Saint Thomas, however, adds his own original twist to this ancient idea. First of all, he often makes his own the notion that the human person lives on the frontier (*confinium*) between time and eternity, matter and spirit,

just as in the Neoplatonic tradition, from which he appears to have borrowed through the *Liber de Causis*:

Man is as though a boundary or border (*confinium*) between spiritual and corporeal nature, as a kind of medium between the two, and participates in the goodness proper to both, corporeal and spiritual.²⁰

The soul is on the horizon of eternity and time, existing below eternity and above time.²¹

There is also another reason why the human soul abounds in a diversity of powers, namely, because it exists on the boundary between spiritual and corporeal creatures, and therefore the powers of both kinds of creatures flow together in it.²²

The theme of microcosm also finds its place quite explicitly in Saint Thomas's thought: "The order of the universe is the end of all creation. But in man there is a kind of similitude of the order of the universe, and that is why he is called a little world, because all natures flow together, as it were, in man."²³ In his later works, however, he seems to become more cautious and reserved in his use of the metaphor of microcosm, undoubtedly in reaction against the exaggerations of those like Robert Grosseteste. Thus Aquinas warns: "Man is assimilated to the larger world in some respects . . . but not in all respects is he thus a similitude of the universe."²⁴

Although he does welcome these two traditional ideas into his own world view, where they in fact fit beautifully, Saint Thomas adds a significant modification of his own to the notion of the human person as the link binding together in itself the two great dimensions of the spiritual and the material. In the Greek Fathers, although they indeed introduced a new Christian revaluation of the body and material things as created by God and hence good in themselves, still one discerns a certain hangover of the Platonic tradition in which they were brought up, in the form of a rather strong dualism of soul and body, matter and spirit. Though united in the human person, they are still very disparate levels of reality, and just as for the Demiurge in Plato, it took some "force" for God to bring these two together into one being. We find this echoed, for example, in the text of Nemesius above: "And so God . . . *forced into one* both the intellectual and the visible by the medium of the generation of man."²⁵ The implication is unavoidable that somehow these dimensions of reality did not naturally belong together and had to be forcibly integrated by the power of God.

For Saint Thomas the optic shifts notably. Far from its being somehow unnatural for a spiritual soul and a material body to come together in one being, the union of soul and body in us is a *natural* one: the soul *needs* the body for its own completion as a human soul. As the lowest of the spirits, coming into being without innate ideas such as the angels have, the soul needs to build up its knowledge of the real world outside of it—and even of its own self explicitly—by interpretation of the material world presenting itself to the soul across the channels of its five senses. The journey of the human mind back to God is a more humble one than that of the angels, a “longer journey,” as Saint Thomas puts it, since we must, as he says over and over, “be led by the hand of material things,” by abstraction and inference, all the way back to the spiritual world and its infinite, purely spiritual Creator. Thus the union of matter and spirit in us is not an unnatural, forced one; God has deliberately created the human soul as the lowest of the spirits, one that by its very nature reaches down into matter to take on a body for itself, thereby lifting up matter into the light of consciousness and enabling the material world to return to God in the great circle of being (emanation and return: the basic structure of the whole *Summa Theologiae*)—through the mediation of the soul as *embodied* spirit, that is, through the human person as the *natural unity* of both worlds.²⁶ Matter is made as gift to spirit.

Once again and as so often, Saint Thomas has taken an old idea, that of microcosm, and given it a distinctive, new orientation of his own. This new perspective, however, is not really opposed to the Greek Christian tradition before him but rather deepens the direction in which it was already moving, allowing a more profound integration of the material and spiritual dimensions of reality which the Greeks were also proclaiming. The human person now becomes even more meaningfully the centerpiece of the created universe, showing forth with ontological splendor the unity of all creation and so of its Creator.

Let us skip quickly now to the Renaissance, where the notion of the human person as microcosm burst forth again with new splendor. The key transition figure here is Nicholas of Cusa, who stands on the border between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, already turning away from the traditional scholastic mode of thinking toward the new. The exaltation of human dignity, soon to take off so dramatically in the Renaissance, is already evident in him: “Human nature is that which is elevated above all the works of God and ranked only a little less than the angels, joining together as it does intellectual and sensible nature and binding all things

to each other, so that it is with good reason called by the ancients a microcosm or little world."²⁷ He goes on to call the human being a "human god," a "second god," because he holds the universe in his mind and is intellectually and artistically creative, unlike the animals, in imitation of God himself.

When we come to the Renaissance itself, the concept takes on new momentum as the leading thinkers, inspired by the rediscovery of classical Latin and Greek humanism, celebrate the grandeur and dignity of the human person in dazzling classical rhetoric. The idea now becomes one of the centerpieces of Renaissance thinking. This period, however, is already so well known that we need only refer to the famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by Pico della Mirandola,²⁸ where the microcosm idea is the focus of the whole address: the glorification of the human goes so far, in fact, that it becomes almost a deification, with the lines not always clearly drawn as to whether this is asserted within the natural or the supernatural orders or both. We are here far from the lowly and fragile condition of the human person, living precariously on the unstable frontier between matter and spirit.²⁹

It is interesting to note that Pico finds among the Persian Sufis (the mystical tradition of Islam) a similar notion of man the microcosm, with the ensuing dignity this confers on the human person—an idea most probably adapted by them from the Neoplatonic tradition. He quotes a striking and beautiful Sufi text in which, because the human being is the bond of unity of all creation, we humans can aptly be called "the marriage song of creation."

As the Renaissance wears on and merges into the age of modern science and the Enlightenment, with Galileo, Descartes, etc., the concept slowly wanes in prominence and interest. One reason is that the new science, with its mathematical structure and strict empirical methods, does not take kindly to such imaginative, untestable thinking. Descartes in particular, with his radical disjunction of mind and matter, effectively breaks the bond of similitude and affinity between the human self and the material world so that the human self no longer feels itself an integral part of nature but as though standing outside of it, controlling it from without.³⁰

A second reason is that the concept itself of microcosm begins to take a turn into more dubious directions, namely, toward astrology, magic, and the occult. The main figure here is the mysterious and unorthodox genius Paracelsus (who died in 1541), doctor, theologian, astrologer, and alchemist. Pushing the notion of the human being as microcosm all the way, he

postulated a very tight union of microcosm and macrocosm into a kind of resonating whole, not unlike the Gaia theory of today.³¹ It was then natural to suppose that the macrocosm—the physical cosmos—could exert significant influence on the microcosm. This became the ontological basis for astrology. Paracelsus brought together philosophy and theology, astrology, alchemy, and medicine to make a potent brew that exercised wide influence long after his death. For him the four pillars of healing were philosophy, astrology, alchemy, and virtue. But that did not sit well with either the new scientists or the theologians.

Moreover, given the theory of Paracelsus on the tight link between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the question immediately arises whether the human microcosm on its part could not also exert reciprocal influence on the macrocosm. Paracelsus recognized the possibility but firmly rejected following it up, for this was the turn into magic, forbidden by the Church. Others were not so reticent and moved into the troubled waters of magic and the occult. For magic is the opposite of authentic religious prayer, as is well known: in the latter we humbly ask *God* to intervene in our lives and help us in our need; in magic we attempt to compel the universe by *our own human will* to fulfill our human wishes, through tapping into the natural forces of the cosmos by ritual, incantation, and other occult means. Such dubious implications further discredited the notion of microcosm.

Reintegrated into religion, however, the idea of man influencing and controlling the cosmos developed into the concept of *homo magus*, "man the magician," with power over the universe under the guidance and in imitation of God, "the Great Magician." Echoes of this can be heard even in the new science when Descartes, for example, exults in the prediction that by mastering the mathematical laws of nature we shall also be able to control nature itself. Later Carl Jung will speak insightfully of this powerful but ambivalent archetype, which can at once exalt our sense of dignity and yet lure us into delusions of grandeur.

There is also a third important reason why the notion of man the microcosm began to lose favor—a theological one this time, namely, the rise of Protestantism. For the new theology of Luther and Calvin taught that when the human race fell into original sin, human nature itself was not only weakened, as Catholic theologians had always held, but thoroughly and irremediably corrupted so that even justification by faith did not heal this corruption intrinsically but only "covered it over" with the merits of

Christ.³² As a result, any singing of the natural dignity and glory of humanity was now deemed quite inappropriate. It was the misery of man, not his grandeur, that now deserved to be sung after the Fall. (In the first oral version of this paper it never occurred to me to make this connection, nor did anyone else bring it up. But after a second presentation, a colleague confided that "Saint Augustine would never have given that lecture" and that after original sin no good Lutheran or Calvinist would dare to sing the grandeur and glory of man as I—and the Greek Fathers—had done!) Undoubtedly the rise of this new Protestant view of fallen man did not a little to erode enthusiasm for the more optimistic but now theologically controversial Catholic tradition.

In our own day, within the flattened-out worldview of secularized science and materialism, there is clearly no place for the conception of the human being as living on the frontier of matter and spirit: there is nothing there on the upper side of the border! It has all been leveled out and absorbed down into the material underside. Similarly with the full notion of man the microcosm: he cannot be the bond of unity of matter and spirit if there is no spiritual dimension to bind into unity. Some contemporary historians of ideas suggest that both of these ancient ideas be dropped or put on the shelf today as historical relics of our naive thinking in the past, dependent—as they believe them to be—on the now discarded notion that man, like the earth, is the center of the universe. As a matter of fact, they are simply mistaken in this historical estimate. The notion of man as microcosm had nothing to do originally with the notion of the earth as physical center of the cosmos, although it could be combined with it. It derived rather from the notion of the human as the center point of the *hierarchy of being* (the different ontological *levels* of being), not of physical *place*, and in this respect is just as apt today as it ever was.

Philosophical Reflection

In past times the two allied notions of the human person as frontier being and as microcosm played an important role in our thought about ourselves. They provided us with a rich holistic vision of how we fitted into a larger whole, not only our own world but the entire universe, and of our special role and dignity, our unique mission, as the bond of unity of the whole and as the mediator of the lower to the higher, of the material world to the spiritual, including the divine itself. Now that this holistic vision

has been either rejected or dropped out of focus in modern thought, we have not replaced it with a richer view of what it means to be human. Rather, we have been left with a painful void, a kind of psychic alienation and homesickness; we do not really feel *at home* in our universe, integrated into it, as did the Greek Fathers, Saint Thomas, and Pico della Mirandola, but instead stand outside of it, controlling it perhaps through science and technology, using it for our purposes but not really feeling part of it. The central thrust of most modern philosophy, from Descartes to Nietzsche, has only reinforced this split between the human person and the natural cosmos by its increasing focus on the subject and its subjective inner world as over against and opposed to the objective world of nature, as trying to dominate it from without, so that it is no longer sure whether it really knows this alien world in itself or is merely imposing its own subjective structures of thought and language upon it.³³

I would like to suggest, however, for those who still admit levels of being within an integrated universe, with a spiritual world extending beyond the material and giving meaning to it—and there are still many who do—that these ancient ideas of man as frontier being and as microcosm are just as valid, enriching, and indispensably nourishing today as they were in their early Christian, medieval, and Renaissance heyday—interpreted in their authentic metaphysical sense, of course, and purified of the various literal exaggerations that accrued to them along the way. The far-reaching implications for philosophy, theology, ecology, spirituality, and psychic integration in restoring these seminal ideas to a place of honor in our contemporary thought are too obvious, I trust, to need detailed spelling out here.

A Confirmation from Contemporary Brain Science

In conclusion, I would like to mention the recent results of some very illuminating and suggestive scientific research in brain physiology, which seems to me to uncover with remarkable precision the physical underpinnings in the brain itself of the ancient insight that we humans are living somewhat precariously “on the edge” of the two levels of matter and spirit, with the frontier an unstable one at that. This is the ongoing research of Dr. Paul McLean of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, resulting in his “Three Brain Theory.” The existence of the “three brains” working together is not a theory but now a well established fact;

but how they cooperate and what are the implications are still matters of theory.³⁴

Here, briefly, is McLean’s theory. Normal members of our human species today—and throughout the history of *Homo sapiens*—have three brain centers actively working together within the one brain. The first is the ancient *reptilian* brain. The reptiles had a very limited horizon for “care”: they did not care for their offspring once hatched but were concerned only with their own survival. As the next higher brain, the *mammalian* brain, evolved after many millions of years, the old reptilian one remained in place, presiding over the basic survival reflexes and leaving the higher brain free for other activities. The new mammalian brain had a wider circle of caring: it cared not only for its own survival but now also for its offspring after birth and, further, for its own closed group but not for anything beyond. When the comparatively recent, higher *neocortex* brain evolved in us, the older mammalian brain remained in place, taking care of the basic, spontaneous animal instincts. But this new or specifically human brain now enables us to live in a wider horizon of intellectual understanding and altruistic caring and love for all human beings, for God, and even for the environment, once we get awakened to the values at stake. All three of these brain centers must work together for a fully developed human life, the lower subordinate in each case to the higher.

But the trouble with humans is that this last brain center has evolved so fast, comparatively speaking, in the course of evolution that the neuron connections between this and its subordinate brains are still not fully developed with strong, stable pathways; the connections are still a bit fragile. The result is that in moments of heavy stress we tend to drop down spontaneously to the next lower level—that is, we first care spontaneously for our own offspring, family, or social group and ward off others threatening it, whether physically or psychologically (family honor, position in a company, etc.). In extreme cases where individual survival is at stake, for example, in a concentration camp, we tend to drop down spontaneously to the lowest level, the ancient reptilian brain, concerned only with fighting for our own survival.

It is possible, however, for us to control these spontaneous tendencies to regression to more primitive levels. Surprising to say, if we develop personal, deliberate *habits* of virtue—of acting according to our higher human values even under some stress—the higher brain actually sends down new neuron connections that strengthen the channels of control of the higher over the lower and thus enable us to resist these primitive

regressions even under extreme stress. But we must develop these new neuron connections by our own *deliberate* action. There is nothing automatic about this; it is a properly human rational activity. Thus we must actively *make* our moral character by habitually acting according to values, to principles, beyond the automatic reflexes of the animal or the reptile. The spontaneous energy of these very ancient brain centers, evolved over many millions of years before the human level appeared, is powerful and needs a deliberately applied higher power to keep them under control, as servants, not masters, of our free actions.

I find this most illuminating in trying to understand the often shocking human behavior we see around us. If we are not well armed with freely developed good habits, we can regress under stress in ways that astonish those outside of the situation: "How can they do that?" For example, I have known Catholic parents dedicated sincerely to the fight against abortion, yet who, under the stress of threat to their family honor when they suddenly discovered their unmarried daughter to be pregnant, closed ranks as a family and pushed her into an abortion. Even more shocking is the recent example of Rwanda, where members of one tribe turned on their own neighbors and murdered them in cold blood, in an unthinking frenzy of blind feeling—*our* blood against *yours*—just like threatened animals. When they recounted the story afterwards, they seemed to fall into a kind of trance, it was reported, as though in some altered state of consciousness. They were indeed; they had dropped back again to the animal stage, in primitive tribal unison, like a pack of threatened wolves.

All this seems to me a remarkable confirmation of how our very biological brain structure reveals a physical underpinning to our human condition as embodied spirits, called to live precariously *on the edge*, on the frontier, between the world of reason-spirit and the animal-reptile world beneath, out of which we have so recently evolved and whose age-old pull is still strong on our higher selves. But fortunately we can do something about our instability. We can deliberately cultivate personal habits of *virtue* and teach ourselves—and our children—to live by the light of reason and love, in a word, to live as the properly *human* images of God that God called us to be. And I suggest that these two ancient ideas we have been exploring, the human person as frontier being and as microcosm, can shed considerable light as we walk this precarious but magnificent human journey back toward our Creator, the Alpha and Omega of all journeys; for by their light we see better not only the nature of our own individual journey

but also how this both includes and is itself caught up in the great overall journey of the macrocosm, the whole created universe.

For it is truly the case that we humans as embodied spirits are destined to live on the edge of matter and spirit, time and eternity. There is indeed a tension within us between the pull of our lower appetites and our higher spiritual longings. And for those who believe that the goal of our journey lies not in this life but in an eternal life beyond, we do indeed have to keep one eye, so to speak, fixed on the exigencies both of coping with our present life in this kind of body and of unfolding our potentialities within it, and the other eye on the final goal that transcends it as its ultimate fulfillment. It is indeed a balancing act that needs both human wisdom and the help of God to succeed. We do not start off our lives with a natural, already given integration of higher and lower. We have to work at it with free, deliberate, responsible choice, cultivating the habits of good action (virtue) which Saint Thomas calls a "second nature," acquired, not innate.

But in so doing we can truly shine forth as microcosms, as the bond of unity of all creation, weaving together into one being the two great realms of spirit and matter and thus showing forth the unity of its Creator, who has poured forth his own goodness so prodigally into creation and now wishes to gather it all together again in himself. And as we advance in this journey, it turns out mysteriously that we do not endlessly have to alternate our gaze now toward time, now toward eternity, but can gradually come to see the Eternal itself shining forth, immanent in the very depths of the temporal. Thus we can come to "see God in all things," as Saint Ignatius Loyola and the other mystics invite us.

The Metaphysics of Religious Art: Reflections on a Text of Saint Thomas

This title may seem at first to be a strange one. Granted, the making or appreciating of a work of art is not itself a work of metaphysics, nor of any philosophical discipline at all. Yet it seems to me that there is a remarkable parallel between the way the religious artist achieves the objective of symbolizing the transcendent and the way the metaphysician, at least a Thomistic metaphysician, achieves the goal of a strictly intellectual ascent of the mind to God. Not that Saint Thomas himself, in the text I am going to examine or anywhere else, as far as I know, ever speaks of religious art, let alone its relation to metaphysics. Nor have I read it anywhere; the comparison is strictly my own. So I would like to present it to you, my readers, many of whom undoubtedly know more about religious art than I do, not as any kind of authoritative teaching of Saint Thomas himself or of the Thomistic tradition, but for your own critical reflection to help me to test out the validity and fruitfulness of my hypothesis. Do I think my hypothesis holds for all religious art? I am convinced—and many artists and philosophers with me—that it is illuminating for a significant proportion of religious art. I would like to think it holds for all. But let's see what you think.

The idea of drawing this comparison came to me suddenly as the result of an experience. I was traveling in India, at the end of a tour for college professors, sponsored by the State Department in 1968, and my mind had

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been deeply stimulated and challenged by contact with the many different religious conceptions of God, or Ultimate Reality, that I found there, together with their varying expressions in art, principally Hindu and Buddhist. I had also taught during the previous semester a course in the metaphysics of Saint Thomas at Fordham University, with particular stress on how Saint Thomas explained the structure of the human mind's intellectual ascent to affirming the existence of God. The experience was this: I was looking at a splendid bronze statue of the dancing Shiva with its six arms, a classic symbol for Hindus of God as Creator and Destroyer, holding in one hand a bell to summon the universe into being, in another a lighted torch, to symbolize its destruction. Despite its strangeness to our ordinary Western artistic sensibilities, it spoke to me powerfully. I was trying to figure out exactly why, when all of a sudden the affinity between the hidden structure at work in the sculpture and that at work in Saint Thomas's metaphysical ascent of the mind to God burst upon me. This is what I would like to present for your consideration, as one more example of what seems to me the ever-fresh fecundity of the philosophical thought of Saint Thomas as applied to areas outside of philosophy. My point of contact with Saint Thomas in this matter will be a single brief but very dense text in his *Summa Theologiae*.¹ The rest of this essay will be devoted to drawing out the implications of this text for understanding the metaphysical and epistemological structures which I think are latent in religious art.

A brief preliminary clarification as to what I mean by "religious art." I am taking the position—controversial, perhaps—that there is a distinctively religious character to certain works of art that is somehow intrinsic to them and not merely due to the extrinsic accident that they are inserted in a religious setting or even illustrating some religious subject matter. Thus the mere fact that a painting—let us grant a good one in itself—depicts a mother lovingly holding a child and carries the title "Madonna" does not make it automatically a piece of religious art. There must be something within the painting itself which gives expression to the religious dimension. Perhaps the simplest way to define or identify this characteristic, so as to apply to all the religious traditions of humankind, whether they use the name "God" or not for the Ultimate Reality they are in quest of, is to describe it as *a thrust toward transcendence*, a reaching beyond the ordinary, all-too-painfully limited level of our human lives toward a higher, more ultimate dimension of reality freed from these limitations. In a word, it is the reaching out of the finite toward the Infinite, expressed

through finite sensible symbols. I take it that the symbol, in this rich context of psychology, art, and religion, may be aptly described as man's ever unfinished effort to express in form what is beyond all form and expression.² The challenge—and the genius—of authentic religious art is therefore to succeed somehow in giving effective symbolic expression to this *thrust toward transcendence*. I am not going to argue here that such authentic and distinctively recognizable religious art exists. The striking examples of it in many religious cultures seem to me sufficient evidence for the fact. My effort here will be focused toward uncovering the hidden metaphysical and epistemological structure behind such art.

The text of Saint Thomas which I wish to unpack is the famous one on the dependence of all our human thinking on the imagination as a springboard; this dependence in turn is the expression in the cognitive life of the deeper metaphysical union of soul and body to form a single, per se, unity—the unified being that is the human person. This text is from the *Summa Theologiae*, part I, question 84, article 7. I'll first discuss the body of the article, which lays out the foundational doctrine, and then more specifically the Reply to Objection 3, which applies this general doctrine to how we know higher, purely spiritual beings, in particular God. Let me first quote the text of the article:

I answer that, in the state of the present life, in which the soul is united to a corruptible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to phantasms. And of this there are two indications. *First* of all because the intellect, being a power that does not make use of a corporeal organ, would in no way be hindered in its act through the lesion of a corporeal organ, if there were not required for its act the act of some power that does make use of a corporeal organ. Now sense, imagination and the other powers belonging to the sensitive part make use of a corporeal organ. Therefore it is clear that for the intellect to understand actually, not only when it acquires new knowledge, but also when it uses knowledge already acquired, there is need for the act of the imagination and of the other powers. For when the act of the imagination is hindered by a lesion of the corporeal organ, for instance, in case of frenzy, or when the act of the memory is hindered, as in the case of lethargy, we see that a man is hindered from understanding actually even those things of which he had a previous knowledge. *Secondly*, anyone can experience this of himself, that when he tries to understand something, he forms certain phantasms to serve him by way of examples, in which as it were he examines what he is desirous of understanding. For this reason it is that when we wish to help

someone to understand something, we lay examples before him, from which he can form phantasms for the purpose of understanding.

Now the reason for this is that the power of knowledge is proportioned to the thing known. Therefore the proper object of the angelic intellect, which is entirely separate from a body, is an intelligible substance separate from a body. Whereas the proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is the quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter; and it is through these natures of visible things that it rises to a certain knowledge of things invisible. Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in some individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter; for instance, it belongs to the nature of a stone to be in an individual stone, and to the nature of a horse to be in an individual horse, and so forth. Therefore the nature of a stone or any material thing cannot be known completely and truly, except inasmuch as it is known as existing in the individual. Now we apprehend the individual through the sense and the imagination. And therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual. But if the proper object of our intellect were a separate form, or if, as the Platonists say, the natures of sensible things subsisted apart from the individual, there would be no need for the intellect to turn to the phantasms whenever it understands.

Objection 3: There are no phantasms of incorporeal things, for the imagination does not transcend time and space. If, therefore, our intellect cannot understand anything actually without turning to the phantasms, it follows that it cannot understand anything incorporeal. Which is clearly false, for we understand truth, and God, and the angels.

Reply to Objection 3: Incorporeal beings, of which there are no phantasms, are known to us by comparison with sensible bodies of which there are phantasms. Thus we understand truth by considering a thing in which we see the truth; and God, as Dionysius says, we know as cause, by way of excess and by way of remotion. Other incorporeal substances we know, in the state of the present life, only by way of remotion or by some comparison to corporeal things. Hence, when we understand something about these beings, we need to turn to the phantasms of bodies, although there are no phantasms of these beings themselves.³

The body of the article expresses the classic teaching of Saint Thomas on the necessary collaboration between intellect and sense knowledge (either the external senses or the imagination) for all *natural* acts of *understanding* in a human subject. I stress “natural” in order to leave open the

possibility of various modes of supernatural infused knowledge which could bypass the senses. I also stress “understanding” in order to leave open the possibility of some directly intuitive acts of knowledge (whether natural or supernatural), such as the intuition of one’s own self as conscious active presence. Any conceptual *understanding* of the nature of this self would involve the cooperation of sense and abstractive intellect. The cognitional theory itself is grounded, as Saint Thomas clearly points out, in the metaphysical per se unity of soul and body to form a single being. All this is too well known to need any further commentary here by me.⁴

Our special interest in this article is twofold: first the way in which such a mode of knowing tied to imagination can come to know purely spiritual beings, in particular God, of which there can be no sense image. This is by way of introduction. Our second and primary focus of interest is in how this way of knowing is reflected in religious art. The Reply to Objection Three contains in very condensed form the essence of Saint Thomas’s teaching on how a human knower can come to know God, a purely spiritual and infinite being, through the collaboration of sense and intellect. This doctrine is also well known, but let me summarize it briefly.⁵

The Mind’s Ascent to God

Saint Thomas insists that we have no direct intellectual understanding of God’s being as it is in itself. We must always begin with the knowledge of the sensible world, and then allow ourselves to be “led by the hand,” as he puts it elsewhere,⁶ by material things, in a dialectical process of “comparison with sensible things,” as he says in our present text, all the way up to an indirect knowledge of God as ultimate cause, with all the attributes appropriate for such a cause.

It is hard for us to appreciate today what a revolutionary stand that was in Saint Thomas’s own time. The common doctrine of the dominant Augustinian school before him and in his own time (supported by Saint Bonaventure, for example) had by the mid-thirteenth century assimilated the new Aristotelian technical theory of knowledge by abstraction from the senses with respect to the material world around us, since Saint Augustine’s illumination theory was focused more on necessary and eternal truths or judgments and had little to say about the formation of *concepts* about the material world. This Aristotelian “face of the soul,” as they put it, looked down, as it were, on the material world around it and abstracted

the forms of sensible things from matter. But there was also a second, definitely higher and more noble, face of the soul, more directly illumined by God, which looked directly up to know spiritual things, such as one's own soul, angels, God, eternal truths, etc.⁷

Saint Thomas resolutely rejected this doctrine of two natural faces of the soul, one looking down into the world of matter, the other looking directly up into the world of spirit.⁸ The structure of our natural human knowledge is far more humble, he believed. There is only the one face of the soul, which is turned directly toward the material cosmos around it only, as presented through the senses. Then, by the application of the basic inner dynamism of the mind, its radical and unrestricted exigency for intelligibility—which can be expressed as the first dynamic principle of knowledge: the principle of the intelligibility of being, “*omne ens est verum*”⁹—we can step by step trace back the intelligibility of this material world to its only ultimate sufficient reason, a single infinite spiritual Cause that is God. The human being is the lowest and humblest of the spirits, whose destiny it is to make its way in a spiritual journey through the material world back to its ultimate Source and its own ultimate home.

What is the general structure of this ascent of the mind to God from the sensible world? It passes along the classic “Triple Way” first outlined by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite¹⁰ and adapted to his own use by Saint Thomas¹¹—as well as by many other thirteenth-century Christian thinkers. Saint Thomas refers to it very tersely in our present text when he says that we know God “as cause, and by way of excess, and by way of remotion.” We first discover God as ultimate cause of all material and finite beings, since no material being in particular, and no finite being in general, can be the sufficient reason for its own existence. What more can we say about this First Cause? Here the Triple Way of Pseudo-Dionysius enters in more explicitly: (1) the way of *positive affirmation* of divine perfections grounded in the causal relation; (2) the way of *negation* or “remotion,” when we remove from what we have affirmed any limit or imperfection; and (3) the way of *reaffirmation* of the perfection in question by expanding it to an *infinite degree*. This final stage Saint Thomas calls the ways of “excess,” a somewhat pale translation of the Latin *excessus*, which means a “going out of itself” by the mind in a movement beyond all finites toward the transcendent.

The *first step* of affirmation based on causality rests on the principle that every effect must in some way, at least analogously, resemble its cause, since all that is in the effect—as effect—must come from its cause, and a

cause cannot give what it does not possess in any way, at least in some equivalent higher mode of perfection. Hence we can affirm that whatever positive perfection we find in creatures must have its counterpart, either in an equal or in some higher analogous equivalent mode, in the cause.

The *second step*, that of negation or remotion, purifies what can be affirmed of God in a proper and literal mode of speech (opposed to a metaphorical mode). Since God is pure spirit and infinite in perfection, we cannot affirm literally and properly of Him any perfection which contains within its very *meaning* some note of imperfection or limitation. This eliminates at once a whole class of attributes or predicates which can be applied literally to material beings or finite creatures but not to infinite pure spirit. Thus we cannot argue that because God is the Cause of the perfection of eyesight in creatures, therefore He has infinitely good eyesight; for eyesight implies the built in limitation of matter and finitude. A rather small number of basic attributes remains which describe perfections which we first find exemplified in creatures in a limited way, but which contain no imperfection or limitation in their meaning. That is, they are purely positive unqualified perfections, values which we must judge to deserve our unqualified approval, to be unqualifiedly better to have than not to have. Such are, for example, existence, unity, goodness, beauty, activity, power, intelligence, will, love, etc. These alone can be affirmed positively and properly of God, not metaphorically. But they too must first be purified of any imperfection or limitation we find attached to them in creatures.

Once we have thus purified them by “removing” all traces of imperfection and limitation, we can then, in the *third step*, reaffirm them of God, adding the index of infinity. Here the mind leaps beyond what it can directly represent or conceive in a clear concept, and, borne aloft by what Plato called “the wings” or “eros” of the soul, that is, the radical drive of the spirit toward the total intelligibility and goodness of being, projects out the positive content of the perfection it is affirming, along an ascending scale of analogy, to assert that this perfection must be found in infinite fullness in God, though the mind cannot directly see or clearly conceive just what this fullness is like in itself. This movement of the mind beyond all finite beings, and hence all clear concepts, is called in our text “the way of excess,” that is, the mind’s going out of itself (*ex-cedere*) beyond all finite concepts.

Application to Religious Art

Now let us apply to the domain of religious art this basic movement or ascent of the philosophical mind toward God. How does the work of art succeed in leading us through sensible symbols to make this leap beyond all sensible symbols toward the Infinite which they symbolize, that is itself beyond all form and symbol? Let us first note that the general structure of the two movements is strikingly similar. Both must start from sense images. And both must make a final leap beyond images and concepts toward a Transcendent Infinite beyond all images and concepts. The way of passing from the first step to the last differs in each. The philosophical ascent follows a purely interior path of intellectual analysis, insight, argument, and so forth. The work of religious art, on the other hand, must somehow stimulate, through the very medium of sensible symbols themselves, the leap of the mind and heart to what is beyond them. How can the work of religious art pull off this remarkable feat of leading its viewer (or hearer) beyond itself, beyond even the entire world of symbols and matter? It seems to me that the process follows very closely the triple path outlined in our present text, in the Reply to Objection three: (1) comparison, (2) remotion, (3) élan toward the transcendent.

The *first step* corresponds to Saint Thomas's "comparison with sensible things." It selects some sensible symbolic structure which suggests some positive similitude, however distant, to the transcendent reality the artist is trying to express. Thus he can lay out symbols of power, majesty, wisdom, love, etc. as found in our world.

The *second step* corresponds to the "remotion" or purification stage in Saint Thomas's Triple Way. Here the artist must suggest the radical difference between his sensible symbol, taken literally, and the Beyond he is trying to express through it. This is equivalent to the removal of limitation and finitude from our concepts in the philosophical ascent. The artist expresses it by introducing a note of strangeness or dissimilitude of some kind into the primary similitude he has first laid down, in order to indicate that what he is pointing to is far different from, and higher than, the original sensible springboard from which he started.

There are many ways an artist of genius can do this, some crude and simple and obvious, such as lifting a human figure above the earth or encircling it with a halo of light. Or an artist can choose some striking creative way to jolt the viewer into the awareness that the work of art is

pointing beyond this dimension of ordinary experience. Such, for example, are the Hindu statues of Shiva, Creator and Destroyer of worlds, portrayed as a dancer with six, eight, or ten arms. Since the upraised hand and arm is a sign of power, a human figure with six arms breaks through our accustomed images and evokes a power beyond that of ordinary humans. It is a similitude shot through with dissimilitude, at once a comparison with sensible things of our experience and a negation of them in their present limited state. Or, to turn to Byzantine Christian art, consider the great icons, which sometimes seem so strange to us in the West, in part because we do not understand what the artist is trying to accomplish. An icon of Mary, the Mother of God, for example, will first exhibit a positive similitude with the human figure of a woman. But if we examine the face we notice a strange unearthly, fixed, and apparently empty stare in the eyes, unlike any ordinary human look. This is the negative moment, the affirmation of dissimilitude, which stimulates us to recognize that she is looking with the eyes of the soul beyond the material world directly into timeless eternity, into the world of the spirit and the divine, beyond all motion and change. Notice too the disproportion in the enlarged size of the heads of the icon figures, considerably larger than life. And I am sure there is no need to recall to you the ancient tradition among icon-makers still observed today—that the artist should fast and pray for three days before beginning his work, in order to tune in more profoundly to the transcendent dimension into which he is trying to draw the viewer.

I ran across another striking example of the play of similitude and dissimilitude in religious art, when I saw a magazine article on the remarkable blossoming of native African religious art, bursting out at the same time all over Africa. It is as though Christianity, after germinating for a hundred years in the African soul, had finally taken root and was producing its own authentically African artistic fruits. One painting especially fascinated me: it was of Christ rising from the tomb, and it depicted a human form seen from a distance, with the facial details indistinct, but with electric sparks shooting out from all over the body, from its arms and legs, as though a lightning bolt had entered into it and was energizing it from within. It was one of the most striking symbols I had ever seen of the intense new superhuman energy emanating from the risen body of Christ, far different from anything seen in our mortal bodies. I have seen nothing like it in any other artistic tradition, East or West. The dynamic synthesis of similitude and dissimilitude shone forth here with unmistakable clarity.

Can the same criterion be applied to musical works of art? My own knowledge of music does not allow me to do this. But musicians in the audiences where I have previously given this lecture have helped me out, insisting that it can be applied. Thus they point out that in certain compositions of Bach for religious purposes, one would expect that according to the natural structure of the music the piece would end on a minor chord, a down note of some kind. Instead it unexpectedly turns up, as though reaching upwards with hope in something higher. Rudolf Otto, who also makes use of the criterion of dissimilitude or strangeness in discussing how the “numinous” is expressed in art, describes vividly in his *Idea of the Holy* how Bach achieves this effect in his Mass in B Minor:

It is instructive to submit Bach’s Mass in B Minor to the test in this matter. Its most mystical portion is the “Incarnatus” in the “Credo,” and there the effect is due to the faint, whispering, lingering sequence in the fugue structure, dying away *pianissimo*. The held breath and the hushed sound of the passage, its weird cadences, sinking away in lessened thirds, its pauses and syncopations, and its rise and fall in astonishing semitones, which render so well the sense of awe-struck wonder—all this serves to express the *mysterium* by way of intimation, rather than in forthright utterance.¹²

Anton Bruckner, too, a deeply religious artist, has his own distinctive way of achieving a similar result. Thus in his Fourth Symphony, and elsewhere, he will start low and soft, then build a rising crescendo, soaring up and up till one feels he is testing the very limits of sound—then suddenly there will be a moment of silence, and the listener tends to keep soaring beyond, into the inexpressible Fullness beyond all sound. César Franck’s “mystical” *Symphony in D Minor* had a similar effect on me when I first heard it in college, but I cannot recall now just how he achieved it. Perhaps those more skilled in music can help us with further examples.

There are an inexhaustible number of other, sometimes infinitely subtle and sophisticated, ways in which an artist of genius can suggest this negative moment of breaking the similitude with our world: the elongated figures of the saints in El Greco; the monumental, often frightening masks of African ritual art; the cone emerging from the top of the head in statues of the Buddha, and so on. If this dimension of negativity, of purification from the limitations of our world, is not present in some way in a work of art, it may indeed be good art, but cannot, it seems to me, qualify as properly religious art. It remains too stuck in the world of our ordinary human

reality to help us spread the wings of the soul and soar toward the transcendent. This criterion can lead us, I think, to disqualify as religious art many famous paintings and sculptures labeled “Madonna” both in our own and in earlier times—including not a few by renowned Renaissance artists, such as Raphael himself. The absorption of these Renaissance artists in particular in exploiting to the full the new realism of the human form effectively stifles, all too often, any *élan* toward the transcendent. We remain absorbed in the natural beauty of womanhood and childhood in themselves.

The *third step*, the *élan* toward the transcendent beyond the merely human and the finite, is really only the other side of the previous stage and so closely woven into it as to allow only conceptual abstraction from it. This is the most mysterious aspect of a work of religious art, where the individual genius of the artist comes most to the fore—a genius often eluding explicit analysis. Somehow, by the dialectical opposition and complementarity of the two preceding positive and negative steps, the artist must stimulate our minds, hearts, and feelings, set them resonating in depth, so that they will be spontaneously inspired to take off from the natural, the worldly, the material, and the finite to reach out on the wings of the spirit toward the transcendent Mystery of the Infinite, the divine. Great religious art has an uncanny power to draw us thus out of ourselves, to help us take off and leave behind both ourselves and the work of art. Thus it is the express aim of Hindu religious music, for example, to draw the listener slowly, through the quality of the music, into a meditative state, which gradually deepens so that the listener is drawn beyond himself into communion with the transcendent and forgets all about the music. All the examples we gave previously as illustrations of the negative moment are also examples, through the very dynamism inherent in the expression of this negative moment, of how religious art can stimulate the *élan* of the spirit toward the Infinite: the statue of the dancing Shiva, the great Byzantine icons, the paintings of El Greco, the African ceremonial masks, etc. So too the reverent contemplation of certain statues of the Buddha, if one follows carefully the continuous rippling folds of his garments, can have a quasi-psychedelic effect and draw one deep into contemplation. So too the great Tibetan Buddhist paintings, which are carefully designed as meditation guides. So too the *Pietà* of Michelangelo, by its deeply moving expression of the meditative silence of Our Lady, draws us into her own contemplation of her son, as God-man and Savior of the world through His Passion.

One of the most obvious and striking examples, one deeply familiar to Saint Thomas himself, is the medieval Gothic cathedral at Chartres, for instance, whose soaring élan of incredibly attenuated, almost dematerialized, stone columns and arches, suffused with light from the sun beyond the structure itself, admirably symbolizes the soaring of the human spirit in adoration and prayer toward the transcendent God, the Light of all finite minds, who “dwells in light inaccessible.”¹³

What is happening in all these instances is that the artist has found a way through his symbolism to tap into and trigger off the great underlying, ever present, but ordinarily latent dynamism of the human spirit toward the Infinite. Thus stimulated, the simmering coals of this immense underground longing of the spirit suddenly flame up into consciousness and, using the symbol as a springboard, leap out toward the hidden Magnet that draws them. Just how the artist succeeds in doing this is his own secret, and often the secret of a whole tradition, once the initial geniuses have found the way. But it seems that the individual artist must himself experience this soaring of the spirit in order to charge his symbols with the power to do this for others. The work of a lesser artist, who either has not had the personal experience of this élan of the spirit, or who has not found the way to incarnate it effectively in sensible symbols, just will not stimulate viewers (or hearers) to take off on the wings of their own spirit, but will leave them earthbound, stuck in the finite, the this-worldly. The artwork may be good art in itself, but not good religious art. Too much so-called religious art is of this earthbound quality.

It should be noted that the sensible symbols themselves are not capable of directly imaging or representing the transcendent in the fullness of its own reality, any more than our philosophical concepts, and in fact less so. Their power comes from their ability to set resonating the underlying dynamism of the human spirit toward the Infinite and offer it a channel (perhaps, to change the metaphor, we might say a lightning rod) through which it can flash into consciousness, and thus allow our integral human consciousness, mind, heart, and will, to soar for a moment toward the Transcendent Magnet that draws it secretly all the time, the Good in which all finite goods participate, the Ultimate Final Cause that draws us implicitly through all limited particular final causes. This radical dynamism of the human spirit toward the Infinite is the *dynamic* a priori of the human spirit, constitutive of the very nature of finite spirit. But the *human* spirit, in order to pass from the state of latent active potency, just under the level of consciousness, to actuality on the conscious level, needs to be

triggered by some initial reference to the world of sense and imagination, since the human act of knowledge is the act of the whole human being, soul and body together.

Once triggered by the sensible image, this dynamism of the spirit can use the latter as a springboard to reach out toward the transcendent in two main ways: (1) in a purely intellectual way by the use of abstract analogous philosophical concepts, or (2) in a more total existential way, by the use of sense images as symbols which set resonating the integral psychic structure of man, mind, will, imagination, emotion—or, if you will, to use the synthetic term preferred by the Eastern tradition, the entire “heart” of man. The intellectual path of concepts points more accurately and explicitly toward the Infinite as infinite. But because these concepts are so abstract and imprecise, they move only the mind. The path of the sensible symbol, on the other hand, is much vaguer and less explicit on the intellectual level, but by its much richer evocative power it sets resonating the whole psyche (including the body in which it is so deeply rooted), and thus tends to draw the whole person into existential communion with the symbolized to which it points. The aim of the abstract concept (or, more accurately, of the judgment in which the concept is embedded) is to lead us toward deeper intellectual comprehension of the Transcendent Mystery; the aim of the artistic symbol is to lead us into deeper existential communion with this same Mystery. Both ways are needed, and complement each other; neither can supplant the other.

The last point to note in our discussion of the text of Saint Thomas is his interesting addition about our mode of knowing purely spiritual beings, which are higher than ourselves but still finite. Saint Thomas says that because they are not the efficient cause of our material cosmos or ourselves we cannot use the path of causal similitude, the first of the Three Ways by which we come to know God. Hence we can know them, he says, only “by comparison or remotion.” He does not even mention here the *excessus* or leap of the mind. This seems to suggest that it is in fact easier to come to know God and something about His nature than to know angels. This is certainly true with respect to our first coming to know of the *existence* of angels compared to knowing the existence of God. Since they are not the cause of our universe, it is not possible to make a firm argument that they must exist under pain of rendering our universe unintelligible, as one can do for the existence of God, in the Thomistic perspective. One has to learn of the existence of angels (both good and bad) either through some revelation, which we accept on faith, or by some

merely suasive argument (such as that they are needed to complete the harmony of the universe as expression of God).

Does this inferiority of our knowledge of the existence of angels compared to our knowledge of the existence of God hold also for an understanding of their nature? Saint Thomas does not tell us here. But one might make the case that this position could be defended, since our knowledge of God contains one added note of precision that cannot be applied to any finite spirit, namely that God is the infinite fullness of all perfection and situated very precisely at the apex of all reality and value for us. Thus it is easier for our concepts about God, joined with the pointing index of infinity, to tap into the underlying dynamism of the human spirit toward the Infinite and stimulate the inner leap of the spirit (*excessus*) toward its ultimate Source and Goal. It would then follow, if we transfer this argument to the sphere of religious art, that it would be in principle easier to create a work of art symbolizing God (or at least our relation to God) than one symbolizing angels. Interesting thesis! And one that contains not a little truth.

However, we do find in fact that the symbolic representation of higher spiritual beings (for example, angels, both good and evil) is common in religious art, not only in the Christian but in other traditions as well. And the experience of the viewer, including the leap of the mind beyond the sensible symbol, seems to be very similar to the experience of religious art referring directly to God Himself. So I would prefer to fit it into the same basic structure outlined above, using not the causal similitude between God and creature but the doctrine of participation of all finite beings in the unitary perfection of God. Since all finite beings, both material and spiritual, proceed from the same ultimate Source, and every effect must to some degree resemble its cause, it follows that all of them must participate in some analogous way in the basic transcendental perfections of God, such as existence, unity, activity, power, goodness, beauty, etc. This immediately posits a bond of analogical similitude between all creatures, reaching in an ascending hierarchy of being from the lowest material being all the way up to Infinite Spirit. Furthermore all intellectual beings share a bond of analogous similitude in the order of spirit, both with God and with each other. It follows that in a work of art, through the dialectical interplay of comparison and remotion, similitude and dissimilitude, the dynamism of our spirit can be stimulated to leap beyond the sensible symbol toward something higher and better than ourselves, *along the way of God*, along the ascending ladder of being towards its infinite apex, hence

worthy of our profound reverence. The attractive power of the higher, precisely because it leads along the path of participated goodness towards the infinite goodness of the Source, can trigger the élan of the spirit to soar beyond our present level of incarnate spirit towards the realm of pure finite spirit, even though this be only a finite participation in Infinite Spirit, which alone is the ultimate Magnet activating the entire life of our minds and wills and enabling them to transcend their own level.

Objections

On the previous occasions when I have given a lecture similar to the present one, I have almost always learned something from the questions and objections of the audience. Before concluding I would like to pick out just two that have, I think, made a significant contribution to either correcting or confirming the position I have presented here.

The first objection is as follows. In presenting your analysis, you have confined yourself entirely to the consideration of the work of religious art taken by itself alone, as though it could be understood and appreciated by anyone who approached it, simply by attending to its internal qualities, without any mention of a social context or social dimension which might be needed to comprehend it. But in all the examples you cited, if you look closely, you will discover that in every case, without some acquaintance with the beliefs and traditions of the social matrix out of which it emerges, its meaning would not be accessible to a stranger to that culture, but remain opaque and closed to that person's appreciation. Granted that there are intrinsic qualities for a work of art to qualify as religious, is it not also necessary to include a social dimension as a necessary condition for its being able to effectively communicate its artistic message?

The objector is quite right. No human being or human product can ever be adequately understood simply by itself. It must always be set in its appropriate social matrix as a necessary condition of intelligibility. I had simply not adverted to this in my explicit analysis, as metaphysicians too often tend to do. Hence for any human being to understand a work of art, especially religious art, emerging from another culture than his or her own, it will be necessary to familiarize oneself, to some degree at least, with the basic social beliefs and traditions of the society out of which the work emerges. "No man is an island."¹⁴ But I would still insist that the intelligibility of a work of religious art is not conferred purely extrinsically

by the social tradition of which it is a part, but must also have its own intrinsic qualifications as well. The social context is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for its meaningfulness to emerge.¹⁵

The second objection goes as follows. You insist on the element of dissimilitude or strangeness as one of the necessary constituents of a work of authentic religious art, but this seems to be missing in what is admittedly one of the great works of religious art in the West, namely, Michelangelo's *Pietà*, which portrays Mary the mother of Jesus, holding her son in her lap after he has been taken down from the Cross and before he is placed in the tomb. Far from there being anything strange or different from ordinary human beings, the two figures of Jesus and Mary are extraordinarily beautiful and perfectly formed specimens of humanity, just like us, only more perfectly human. So this criterion of dissimilitude does not always seem to be needed.

When this objection was first proposed to me, I admit I was stumped for the moment and did not know quite how to cope with it. But some artists (or perhaps art historians) in the audience came to my rescue and claimed the example only confirmed my position. It seems that if you observe this great piece of sculpture closely, there are two significant elements of strangeness hidden subtly within it. First of all, the proportion of the human figures is significantly different from what it would be in real life. The figure of Jesus, the son, is distinctly smaller than the figure of his mother on whose lap he lies; as though she is larger than life, already growing into the great all-mother of humankind. Once called to your attention, the disproportion of size is significant, and certainly not the result of chance or lack of skill. Secondly, one would imagine that in the portrayal of a mother grieving over the death of her only son, cruelly and unjustly tortured and covered with wounds, the mother would be weeping in anguish. Not so Mary here. The artist portrays her with an astonishing calm and peace, that could come only from some higher power working within her or some higher vision of a deeper, more positive meaning to this apparently crushing and irredeemable loss, looked at from a natural point of view. So, very subtly and unobtrusively portrayed, there is a very definite element of strangeness in this great work, drawing us quietly into a higher world of God-centered meaning and the inner strength flowing from it. I am very grateful for enlightenment on this point, which I had somehow never adverted to myself.

Whether or not my position can cope with *all* objections taken from the history of art as well as with this one remains still untested. My intuition says "yes," but I would not commit suicide if proved wrong.

Conclusion

Our aim has been to follow the lead of Saint Thomas in uncovering the underlying metaphysical and epistemological structures supporting the ability of authentic religious art to give symbolic expression to the transcendent and our relation to it. The epistemological structure is based on Saint Thomas's distinctive theory of human understanding as a synthesis of sense and intellect, according to which any act of the intellect must first find footing in some image of the senses or the imagination and then use it as a springboard to go beyond the sense world, either to the formal essence of the sensible thing itself or to its cause. The ascent of the mind to know God takes place through a triple process of (1) causal similitude; (2) negation of all imperfections and limits, that is, negation of exact or univocal similitude; and (3) reaffirmation of the purified perfection together with a projection of it toward infinite fullness, accomplished by a burst into consciousness of the radical unrestricted drive of the human spirit toward the Infinite—a drive that is constitutive of the very nature of finite spirit as such. This *élan* or *excessus* of spirit enables it to leap beyond its own level and all finite beings to point obscurely through the very awareness of its own dynamism (the *pondus animae meae* of Saint Augustine) toward the Infinite. The metaphysical underpinnings of this theory of knowledge are (1) the integral union of body and soul to form a single being with a single unified field of consciousness; (2) the radical drive of the spirit (intellect and will) toward the Infinite as ultimate Final Cause; and (3) the doctrine of creation, explained in terms of participation and causal similitude, which grounds a bond of analogical similitude not only of all creatures with God but also of all creatures with each other.

The inner dynamism of the authentically religious work of art follows the same path of ascent. It must first put forth a positive symbolic expression of some similitude with the transcendent; then partially negate this similitude, by introducing some element of strangeness or dissimilitude with our ordinary experience on a finite material level. The dialectical interplay of similitude and dissimilitude must then be artfully contrived so that by its very structure it taps into and awakens the ever present but latent dynamism toward the Infinite that lies at the very root of all finite spirit, so that our spirit takes wing and soars in an *élan* or *excessus* (a going out of itself) reaching beyond the sensible symbol toward lived communion of the integral human being with the Transcendent Reality it is trying to express. The genius of the artist consists in the ability to give symbolic

expression to dissimilitude within similitude in such a way as to set resonating the deep innate longing within us all for the transcendent, so that the work of art finally leads us beyond itself in a self-transcending movement, “dying that we might live” more deeply—an analogue of the loss of self in order to find the true self characteristic of all authentic religious living. To sum it up in Saint Thomas’s own extraordinarily terse but pregnant terms: *comparatio*, *remotio*, *excessus*.

SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Let me just suggest some ways of applying this theoretical analysis of the hidden metaphysical structure at work within authentic religious art.

1. It can help us to appreciate more deeply and intelligently the great religious art of the past and present. It can also make us more critically sensitive to what is commissioned and accepted as religious art in our churches, chapels, schools, or homes. It will make it easier to smoke out the authentically religious from the merely sentimental, “pretty,” popular kind of art that used to be all too common in some of our older churches and in homes, where the figures were all too human and familiar and conveyed little if any sense of mystery, awe, and a pull toward the sacred and the transcendent.

2. The same point applies to the critical appreciation and renewal of liturgy and liturgical ritual. This application was suggested to me by some of my former students now working in liturgy or theology, who had read a draft of the present lecture and are themselves drawing upon some very insightful recent critiques of our present liturgy. These critiques are not just complaints of grumpy conservatives who do not like change in principle, but are based on the insights of the psychology and sociology of religion looking towards a renewal of the religious efficacy of our liturgy. One of the representative examples is by Aidan Nichols, OP. The core of his critique is that despite the many good points in the present Eucharistic liturgy, there are still some serious flaws not only in its practice but in the theory behind it. The theory is that *simplicity* and *intelligibility* should be central guiding principles of the structuring of ritual for our day. The flaw is that these can be carried so far that everything becomes so familiar and transparent in meaning that the sense of mystery and the sacred—with the awe and wonder that are the appropriate response to it—is seriously attenuated if not snuffed out entirely.¹⁶ Connecting this up with the foregoing analysis of sacred art, it seems that what has been left out or not

adequately made provision for is precisely the second element of dissimilitude or strangeness with respect to our ordinary life. As a result one can indeed experience in the liturgy a warm sense of togetherness and community—which is a plus—but yet feel no drawing toward the Transcendent dimension of the sacred mystery being enacted through the mediation of the ritual. After all, being drawn into living communion with the Mystery is the living soul and purpose of all liturgical ritual, is it not? There may well be something serious to reflect on here; and it certainly underlines again the indispensability of the dissimilitude criterion for authentic and effective religious art, including ritual.¹⁷

PART II

New Articles

The Immediate Creation of the Human Soul by God and Some Contemporary Challenges

I have picked out this topic for presentation to you today for a special reason, extending beyond merely philosophical concern. In the last few years this topic has become a new and hotly debated one of serious theological and not merely philosophical concern, a test case of traditional Christian, or at least Catholic, thought and, in addition, a direct challenge to the position of Saint Thomas Aquinas, which for a long time has also been the unquestioned position of traditional Catholic thought in both philosophy and theology. Hence I would like to present to you again this old problem in the light of the specific new challenges being brought to it today. What should be of special interest and concern to us as members of the American Catholic philosophical community is that these new challenges are not coming simply from professed materialist and reductionist positions, which have long been known to us, but from Christian thought itself, mainly Protestant thinkers, but increasingly Catholic ones too. What I propose to do is (1) briefly present traditional Catholic doctrine on the subject; (2) then the classic philosophical argumentation of Saint Thomas for it; then (3) the new contemporary challenges to it from within Christian thought.

Traditional Catholic Doctrine

The spirituality of the soul and its immediate creation by God have been accepted as traditional Catholic doctrine, even pertaining to faith, at least since the great Fathers of the Church of the fourth century, although the early Church held an unclear position (Tertullian apparently believed that

the soul was a quasi-material power handed down by sexual generation).¹ We find the doctrine clearly stated in *Denzinger's Enchiridion*, the standard repository of official Church teaching from all sources, in at least three texts: (1) In a "Profession of Faith," imposed for a particular occasion in 1054, Pope Leo IX states: "That the soul is not a part of God, but created out of nothing [*ex nihilo creatam*] I believe and teach [*credo and praedico*]."² (2) In an 1887 condemnation by the Holy Office of the doctrinal errors of Rosmini-Serbati it is stated as number twenty of the condemned propositions: "It is not repugnant that the human soul is multiplied by generation, so that it may be understood as proceeding from the imperfect state, namely, the sense level of being, to a perfect state, namely, the intellectual level."³ (3) In his encyclical *Humani Generis* of 1950, Pope Pius XII declares: "The Magisterium of the Church does not prohibit the development of the doctrine of 'evolution' insofar as it investigates the origin of the human body as arising from already existing and living matter—for the Catholic faith orders us to retain the doctrine that souls are immediately created by God."⁴ This last text is the strongest, declaring it a matter of faith for the whole Church. Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the doctrine in his remarkable *Letter on Evolution*⁵ several years ago, when he urged Catholic thinkers to no longer resist the general theory of evolution but integrate it into an enriched vision of how God created our material world and worked on it through billions of years of guided development to finally bring forth humanity as the crown of the whole process. The pope, however, makes explicit exception for the immediate creation of the human soul by God, once again referring to a common tradition of the Church.

But it must be conceded that according to the rules of strict theological interpretation, none of the above qualifies as a formal, officially defined doctrine of the Church to be believed by all under pain of heresy. It is simply taken for granted as a traditional doctrine of Catholic faith (even an encyclical—powerful a witness though it be—does not automatically qualify as an official definition obliging under faith unless explicitly so stated, which is not the case here). It remains clear, however, that for many centuries, since even before the Middle Ages, it has been taken for granted and explicitly asserted as being part of Catholic faith.

Philosophical Justification by Saint Thomas

Aquinas is clear and adamant not only on the spirituality of the soul, but also that it is immediately created by God, that is, produced out of nothing

(out of no pre-existing material or subject of any kind) by God alone, unlike any other creature that possesses a body in our material world. Not even angels can be intermediary or instrumental causes in this process. His argument proceeds in two parts: (1) *The human soul is spiritual* (in the strong sense of immaterial, that is, transcending the whole order of matter and the senses). It is important to pin down this point first, before discussing the origin of the soul, or its relation to the body. (2) *The human soul has its origin in God*. It cannot be put together out of any pre-existing parts, either material or spiritual, hence it is totally created out of nothing. Since only God has the power to create out of nothing, the human soul can originate only through immediate creation by God.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE HUMAN SOUL

The main sources for Aquinas's argument on the spirituality of the soul are *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 90, a. 2–3, and *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, c. 49–50. The first text is a puzzling one because it limits itself to a single argument (most unusual for Thomas), which seems to me to not go far enough, since it proves that the soul is not a body but a form giving life to the body, but without adequately distinguishing the human form from the forms of plants and animals. The second text is much fuller and gives several much more persuasive arguments, which have become part of the Thomistic tradition. These proceed by analyzing the characteristic actions of the human soul and showing that they are spiritual in nature, and hence require a spiritual nature from which to proceed.

Spiritual Activities of the Soul

We produce abstract universal ideas that capture the unified meaning common to an indefinite number of individual instances and cannot be specified or represented by any sense images, which are always particular and singular. Hence these ideas transcend the particularized location and limitation in space and time, the spatial extendedness, characteristic of the material mode of existence. For example, when I abstract the universal concept *house* from many individual houses I have seen, I understand that I can apply its meaning indefinitely to an open-ended, innumerable number of individual houses throughout all periods, of all sizes, by any materials, etc. What I have abstracted here is the meaning, not the purpose, of a house. But no sense image can capture and express the purpose of a house, let alone the purpose of all houses. It can express only the particular shape,

color, etc., of an individual particular house. So too I can draw many different sizes and shapes of a triangle on the board. I understand clearly the meaning, the nature, of all triangles, but I cannot draw on the board any visible triangle that represents what is common to all triangles, but only another particular triangle, not its meaning, its law of construction.

Also, we can understand the meaning of ideas like love, justice, moral obligations ("oughts"), being, and God, of which there can be no sense images. We also have immediate self-consciousness, self-awareness of our own identity, expressed by our ability to meaningfully say "I," where the speaker and what is spoken about are absolutely identical, involving no dispersal of parts-outside-of-parts that is characteristic of material bodies with their spatial extension. We also have an unlimited openness in our desire to know all being without limit, which is impossible for any material being limited to space and time. The products, therefore, of our intellectual understanding of things, which we achieve by abstracting the universal meanings common to many individuals, transcend the order of space, time, and particularity proper to material entities, and hence are *immaterial* in nature *as source*. Now if the characteristic products of the human mind are spiritual (transcending matter) in nature, not produced through the mediation of any sensible organ, then the nature from which they proceed, which we call the soul, the principle of intellectual life, must itself be spiritual in nature. The higher cannot proceed from the essentially lower; this would violate the principle that the effect cannot be greater than its cause. Hence the nature, the source from which the actions proceed, must be at least on the same level of ontological perfection as the actions which proceed from it. It follows immediately that the act of existence of the intellectual soul, its *esse*, as Saint Thomas calls it, must also be spiritual, proportioned exactly to the essence or nature it actuates. The soul must therefore own its act of spiritual *esse*, which it then lends to the body which it has taken to itself.

The human spiritual soul, however, as embodied spirit, also needs a body, not for its actual existence, but in order to initiate its operations by providing the material for them from the sense, though it goes far beyond the senses in its higher purely intellectual operations. Since this union of soul and body is also a natural one, not a combination of two distinct substances but a single natural being with a single nature and act of existence, where the soul itself acts as the natural form of the body (though this does not exhaust its powers), it follows that the union of soul and body

must be special, different from the form-matter composition of lower beings like plants and animals, whose form is not spiritual in nature. That is, the soul cannot derive its existence from its union with the body, thus depending on the body for its existence, but must rather lend its own spiritual *esse* to the body, so to speak, taking the body up into its own spiritual existence to share it with the body, insofar as the latter can participate in it as a spiritualized body, a human, not an animal, body. Thus when the body drops off from the soul at death, the latter retains its own act of spiritual existence, draws it back into itself, and no longer communicates itself to the body, though it can no longer acquire new knowledge in its usual way until it regains its body at the resurrection.

ORIGIN OF THE SPIRITUAL SOUL

Once this basis of the spiritual nature of the soul as owning its own act of existence is established, it then follows that it cannot be brought into being any way except through immediate creation by God. This is the crucial part of the argument, consistently overlooked by the opponents of the position, I have observed. First of all, a spiritual entity, with no material or essential parts to it, present like a concentrated spiritual energy without extension or dispersal in space, cannot be produced out of any pre-existent material components, since it is immaterial, of a different order of being entirely.

Nor can it be produced from any pre-existing spiritual “parts,” by the parents, for example, as not a few Catholic thinkers, following the suggestions of Karl Rahner, would like to hold. Remember that there are *two* parents. Could we say that the father contributes half a soul and the mother the other half? This does not make sense. There can be no half of a spiritual soul; the only parts of a spiritual soul can be intellect and will, and one can’t give half an intellect or half a will. And obviously one cannot hold that the father gives the entire spiritual soul to the child, or the mother either: that would be an insult to the other partner. Furthermore, any pre-existing spiritual entity of any kind would have to be a conscious spiritual being, because it would be endowed with intellect and will as all spiritual entities must be. Now it is impossible to transform one spiritual being into another: the necessary condition for any substantial change, such as this would have to be, is something formless that can pass over from one terminus of the change to the other, and this can only be primary matter. Spiritual beings can be created and annihilated, but not changed

into each other or anything else, since they have no matter in their make-up. It follows necessarily, then, that if the human spiritual soul cannot be produced out of any pre-existing parts, whether material or spiritual, it can be produced only by creation, that is, by production out of nothing pre-existing.

The final step of the argument now follows inevitably. The only agent that can produce anything by immediate creation out of nothing pre-existing is God. Such an agent, Saint Thomas explains, would have to have power over, be the very source of, being itself. This power no creature possesses; the only active power creatures possess is to transform something that already exists in some form to another mode of being, in other words, to be the cause of the *becoming or change* of what already has being into some other mode of being, never the cause of *being* absolutely in itself, as standing out of nonbeing entirely. It can only be *causa fiendi, non causa essendi*, as Saint Thomas puts it.

Saint Thomas then goes on to draw one last conclusion: it follows that no creature, not even an angel, can act even as an instrumental cause in collaboration with the primary cause in the act of creation. Since nothing at all is presupposed for the act of creation save the power of the primary agent, and it is the nature of the instrumental cause to contribute something of its own not possessed by the primary cause, there is nothing extra of its own that a created cause could possibly contribute to the immediate production of a new being out of nothing. Hence the act of creation of the human spiritual soul out of nothing must be an immediate act of God alone.

This immediate origin of the human soul from God alone now confers a unique dignity on the origin of the entire human person, as an embodied spirit. Unlike any animal or lower being on our earth, it derives from the direct collaboration of both heaven and earth, so to speak. On the one hand, the human body results from the long slow evolution of life on our planet from the tiniest one-cell creature to the highest, most complex body that nature has so far been able to produce; on the other, since material nature can now go no further, God comes down to infuse a spiritual soul directly into this long-prepared living body, to take over and make its own, to live out its unique new mode of life as an *embodied spirit—a human person*, a unique fusion of the two great domains of reality in our universe, the spiritual and the material—“man the microcosm,” a single being summing up all the levels of being in the universe in itself, and so pointing to the unity of its Creator, as the Greek Fathers of the Church loved to put

it. Such is the authentic Christian tradition, the fruit of both divine revelation and human philosophical analysis. The human being is a being at once rooted in nature and yet stretching beyond it into the world of spirits, “the lowest of the spirits,” as Saint Thomas loves to put it, that needs a body to carry out its destiny of a journey through the material world toward fulfillment by union with the infinite fullness of being and goodness beyond this world.

Some Contemporary Challenges

One contemporary challenge, of course, is that of the traditional out-and-out reductionist materialism, which simply reduces all conscious states, at least in principle, merely to biological brain states, complex neuron patterns in the brain; or else, in a more mitigated form, reduces all conscious states merely to passive epiphenomena or by-products, of brain states, with no causal influence on the brain itself or our behavior. But this position has been with us for a long time, and its serious philosophical flaws have long been evident: it simply does not do justice at all to the properties of consciousness and the higher activities of the mind. And it is not what is most interesting among the contemporary challenges. So we shall omit discussion of it here.

The second challenge is a comparatively new one, occurring within Christian thought itself, including, very specifically, Catholic thought. It denies, or throws philosophical and theological doubt on, the immediate creation of the human soul by God. This position was sparked principally by Karl Rahner, in his book *Hominisation* and his other articles, dealing with the evolution of humankind.⁶ He admits without question the genuine spirituality of the human soul, and also the need of some special divine intervention to step up the power of the natural agents involved, but suggests that God could still work through the natural agents as instruments, especially parents. If parents could believe they not only contributed to their child’s body, but to its immortal soul, they would have a greater dignity and sense of intimate participation in their child’s life. This suggestion of Rahner’s has been widely taken up by many other Catholic thinkers.

When I began to read Rahner’s writings on the subject carefully, however, I discovered to my surprise that he never explicitly takes up the powerful metaphysical arguments of Saint Thomas excluding all but

immediate creation as adequate cause for the emergence of the human spiritual soul. His main argument seems to come down to this: "We don't want God to interfere in the ongoing natural process of evolution by a completely independent act of causality not working through the existing forces of nature, do we?" The reader is apparently supposed to respond, "Of course not." I would rather say, "That's exactly what we do want—and need." And such "interference" would greatly add, in fact, to the dignity of the human parents. Now, the production of a new human child, endowed with an immortal spiritual soul, is the direct collaboration of earth and heaven: of earth through the body that the parents have prepared as the highest point of the evolutionary thrust of the material world coming up from below; of heaven, by the direct, loving collaboration of the Creator, introducing the realm of spirit into matter in this most unique of all creatures, an *embodied spirit*.

We might also add that if one does insist on the direct causal influx of the parents on the production of their child's soul, a very strange situation results. Since several hours intervene between the act of sexual intercourse and the actual conception of the embryo, as the sperm travel through the fallopian tubes, at this crucial moment of bringing into being out of nothing a spiritual soul, neither the father nor the mother would have any idea that they are actually performing this act with God, nor how to go about performing it, nor perhaps even want to do so; the father in fact might be out playing golf, the mother doing the laundry, or both asleep! That both parents could perform such an important and spiritual act unconsciously, unintentionally, or perhaps even deliberately not wanting to at all, yet nonetheless perform it effectively, does not make good sense. Rahner in his various treatments, strangely, neither brings up explicitly nor answers these precise metaphysical difficulties.

But since we have already presented Aquinas's own arguments for the immediate creation of the human soul; we shall now pass on to the newest and most interesting of the contemporary challenges, which we are especially keen on presenting here for your critical reflection, since it reveals such a profound shift even within Christian thought of what it means to be a human person.

NONREDUCTIVE PHYSICALISM

This is a fairly recent movement, started initially by a group of Protestant Christian thinkers (philosophers, theologians, scripture scholars, psychologists, etc.), and has now picked up wide support, principally among Protestants but drawing in more and more Catholic adherents. These thinkers

are trying to reconcile their Christian faith and traditions with the findings of neuroscience. They wish to preserve intact what is really essential in the Christian tradition of the moral and religious dimension of the human person: prayer, love and worship of God, an altruistic love of one's neighbor, the resurrection of the body, and a future life with God—all the basic biblical values. They have been much influenced by discussions among mind-body philosophers of the contemporary, predominantly analytic school. They have now come out with a common manifesto: *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*⁷ What is their answer to the question? Nancey Murphy, of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, one of the philosophical leaders of the movement and one of its animating spirits, gave us the answer without hesitation in an April 2005 lecture at Pepperdine University's Seaver College: "It's gone!" There just is no such thing as a spiritual soul; it is not compatible with the conclusions of contemporary neuroscience. We must have the courage to bite the bullet and adjust Christian belief to fit this new scientific vision which is now so much a part of being a citizen of the twentieth century.⁸

What is meant by *nonreductive physicalism*? There are four key points:

1. Any kind of dualism of substances or natures is out, that is, a bodily or physical substance joined with a spiritual or immaterial substance, such as the soul. In fact, anything of a so-called spiritual nature, made of different "stuff" than the ordinary material of our world, not subject to the laws of nature that govern the rest of the world, must in principle be excluded. One reason is that such an entity could not interact with the bodily part, since this would require feeding new energy into the physical system, and this would violate a fundamental law of physics: the conservation of mass-energy at a constant, fixed amount in our universe.⁹

2. The one basic subject or agent in the human person is a purely physical subject—substance, if you will—which means the physical body we have, with its control center in the brain. However, in addition to its physico-chemical and biological properties it has a set of *higher properties*—self-consciousness, moral and religious activities, and the like—which are not reducible to the scientifically observable physico-chemical and biological activities of the brain (at least not yet). There is thus a *dualism of properties*, not a dualism of *substances*. But these higher activities are exercised by the one purely physical subject. However, most of the defenders of the position also hold that this cluster of higher properties exercises a downward (or "top-down") causality on the brain and bodily behavior of

the subject—the mental on the physical, not just the physical on the mental—a bottom-up causality—as a strict materialist would hold.

3. What about death? Here is where the implications of the doctrine emerge clearly in head-on conflict with the Catholic tradition. When we die, the physical subject dies totally, as is to be expected if it is purely physical. But since the properties belong to the physical subject, they necessarily disappear too. All our individuality is totally gone, they admit (*ganz tot*, as the Germans say). There is no distinct spiritual and hence immortal soul to endure for any kind of after-life, including the Resurrection. The latter would be holding onto Greek metaphysics, not biblical teaching.

4. What then of the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection, which as Christians they are obliged to hold? They have recourse here to what they call “recreation by divine power.” God simply recreates the same me over again with a new glorified body (either by reassembling the elementary parts or, if necessary, by creation out of nothing). How can he do that? God is omnipotent and can do whatever he wants. Most of the defenders of the position will not enter into the *how* at all, leaving it entirely as a matter of biblical faith in the word of God that is beyond the reach of both science and philosophy. Thus the claims of both neuroscience and authentic biblical Christian faith can be done justice to and reconciled. The leading philosophical exponents of this position seem to me to be Nancey Murphy, as mentioned above, and Philip Clayton, professor of philosophy at California State University, Sonoma, although there are many fellow travelers, as the books mentioned in note eight clearly show.

PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF NONREDUCTIVE PHYSICALISM

I submit that nonreductive physicalism—even laying aside its head-on conflict with the long Christian theological tradition, made fully explicit in the Catholic version—is deeply flawed philosophically, both in its denial of the spirituality of the soul and in its explanation of death and resurrection. Let us take each in turn.

Denial of Spiritual Soul

The notion of a purely physical subject that exercises higher activities irreducible to the physical properties of the same subject cannot stand up under metaphysical analysis. These higher properties are not mere linguistic predicates that can be moved around and attached arbitrarily to any

kind of subject. They are real actions springing from and expressing a real *nature*—that is, an “abiding center of action and being acted on,” as Aristotle and Saint Thomas would put it. The source (nature) from which such actions proceed must be at least on the same level of ontological perfection as that which proceeds from it and expresses it. Otherwise the more will proceed from the less, and the surplus of being in the action over its source will come from nowhere. But this does not make sense, violating the principle that the effect cannot be greater than the cause. So a purely physical nature or agent cannot produce activities that are irreducible to the physical. It must be that the physical subject is not purely physical, but has a higher dimension to its own nature transcending the merely physical. In a word, there must be not just an irreducibility of properties but an irreducibility of natures to do adequate justice to such a situation. It must be, therefore, that not just a new property but a *new nature*, a new holistic entity or being has emerged on a higher ontological level than a purely physical subject (as most present-day neuroscientists seem to insist upon—they are highly allergic to the intrusion into their science of any “alien” nonphysical kind of power in principle inaccessible to science). This new nature can then have two levels of properties and activities—one higher, one lower—within itself as a single complex nature.¹⁰

What has misled the defenders of the nonreductive physicalism movement, I think, is that they have drawn the wrong conclusions from the rejection of a dualism of substances within the human being. They are entirely correct in insisting that there is no dualism of soul and body as two substances, taking Plato and Descartes as the paradigms of dualistic doctrines. Saint Thomas completely agrees with them in this; he insists that the human being forms one complete being with a single substance-nature, that is a complex one made up of a natural union of body and spirit—an *embodied spirit*, the lowest of the spirits that needs a body (with a human brain) to provide it with the data it needs to carry on its intellectual activity in this material world. But it does not at all follow, just because there is only one substance or nature, one agent subject in a human being, that this subject-agent can only be the lower, purely physical level of this complex nature, so that therefore the higher activities must be relegated to the status only of *irreducible properties* of a lower nature. A two-level nature is needed to produce two-level properties.

Saint Thomas takes the opposite option, which the physicalists never even seem to have considered: the lower cannot be the active source of higher actions proceeding from it; but the higher can well be the source

of lower level actions. The lower can't contain the higher, but the higher can contain the lower without violating any principle of sufficient reason. Thus Saint Thomas, after showing that the human being performs higher cognitive operations that are immaterial and irreducible to the senses, and therefore must possess a spiritual dimension to its nature with its own spiritual existence, then goes on to show that this intellectual knowing power is incomplete without a body and takes over a body for itself, lending it its own act of existence to make it a single complete nature equipped to carry out its special role on this earth. The intellectual soul then functions in this whole partly as a "form in matter," as Thomas would put it, that is, the principle of unity working within a living body to organize and direct all and only its activities carried on in the body through bodily organs. But the powers of this same intellectual soul are not exhausted by its activity as form in matter (form of the body). It is only a "part time worker" in the body, so to speak. It is a form *plus*, a form *and* a spirit, a spiritual substance that can carry on its own higher spiritual activities, beginning from the body but stretching out beyond the capacities of the latter, an agent that can operate on two levels, one higher, one lower, one on the level of bodily operation, the other of spiritual.

There is no dualism of *substances* here, but a dualism of *levels of activity* within the one substance or nature. The contemporary nonreductive physicalists seem strangely unaware that there is such a solution of the problem available in the history of philosophy. Saint Thomas's solution achieves the same result that these contemporaries so vigorously and successfully argue for, that is, the irreducibility of the higher moral and religious activities in the person to the merely physical and biological, but without the serious drawback that the purely physical subject they postulate as the source of these operations is not up to the job that is being asked of it.

One objection that keeps coming up in all these nonreductive physicalists seems to block them from being open to consider the possibility of a two-level nature with spirit and matter working together in intimate collaboration, the two interacting with each other or mutually influencing each other. It runs as follows. It is impossible to combine together into a single nature a material entity (the body-brain) and an immaterial entity (spiritual soul) so that they interact with each other—Descartes' problem again. In particular, it is impossible for the spiritual part to exercise "top-down causality," that is, efficient causality, on the body-system, as is claimed by the nonreductive physicalists; for any exercise of efficient causality on a material system requires a new input of energy into the system,

and this would violate the sacrosanct physical principle of the conservation of matter-energy: the total amount of matter-energy in the universe is fixed and constant from the beginning, though its transformations can be endless and highly complex. Hence no intrusion on the material system from an outside nonmaterial agent is possible. This objection is taken very seriously, as decisive, by most of the contemporary scientists and philosophers working in this area, including the nonreductive physicalists.

This objection is a straw man. What is needed for the soul to influence the brain and bodily behavior is not more material energy; it is only a change in the *information pattern* governing the flow of energy in the brain, directing the available energy to be transferred from one part of the body to another. (All the incredibly complicated transactions of the hundred billion neurons in our brain are carried out, I am told, by the equivalent of one 30-watt light bulb.) But information, though it needs to be carried by some material carrier, is not itself spatially extended material stuff, but of the order of form, and transformation of form and information is precisely what the mind is equipped to do. Furthermore, when the spiritual soul is united to the body to make a single nature, it is not as an *efficient* cause acting on some extrinsic entity, but as a *formal* cause structuring the matter from within.

How does a higher formal cause work to control the activity of the lower material systems within its body, to exercise “top-down causality” on them, as they say? Not by efficient causality, infusing new material energy into them, but precisely by limiting, restricting the behavior of the lower elements so that they exercise their reservoirs of power only this way here and now, not that way, in a word, by structuring, channeling, the pattern of energy flow under orders from above. It is amazing to note how, ever since the advent of modern science with Newton and his followers, almost all modern scientists and most modern philosophers, especially philosophers of science, have insisted on dealing only with efficient causality and banning both formal and final causality as acceptable factors in explanation. How this narrowness of perspective has led to insoluble impasses in current “action theory” in contemporary analytic philosophy has been brilliantly laid out in a recent book.¹¹

Another objection is widely held by not only nonreductive physicalists but also others influenced by evolutionary biology. It tries to block any attempt to allow something strictly spiritual within the human being, which would then involve the intervention of a higher spiritual agent, such as God, to causally introduce it beyond the natural process of evolutionary

nature itself. This stems partly from a general principle of “naturalism” which is simply taken for granted, for the most part, as beyond serious discussion. This is the principle that nature is a single, great, all-embracing whole that contains everything on this earth within it, including human beings, and contains within itself all the resources needed to bring forth whatever appears in the whole history of evolution on this earth. One can indeed be a “theistic naturalist,” holding that God as Creator started off the whole process; but he still infused into it all the resources it will need, as active potencies, to be actualized as needed, with the capacity to produce all the levels of life that appear on earth from the lowliest one-cell creature to humanity itself. And this whole world of nature is open to the investigation of science.

The other principal ground for this exclusion of anything strictly spiritual from the human being that would be in radical discontinuity with the rest of biological nature is the fact that the evidence from evolutionary science has now become so great as to the gradual emergence of intelligence over long periods of time, through many hominid ancestors and seemingly intelligent pre-*Homo sapiens* species, that it is no longer plausible to insist on a radical discontinuity in the process occurring with an instantaneous infusion of a new spiritual principle all of a sudden from without, with no clear signs of its abrupt appearance. Hence a clear line separating “animal” from “human” no longer seems possible or at least plausible. Several Catholic thinkers have declared that if Saint Thomas were to come back again and discover the progress of the evolutionary science he never knew, he would no longer hold the strong dualism of matter and spirit he did in his own time. Another holds that it is no longer possible to know the limits of “matter,” hence no longer possible to draw a clear line between matter and spirit. Others speak of “the outdated distinction between matter and spirit.”

The objection from the gradual appearance of intelligence over long periods of time seems to me the strongest, most serious argument against the immediate creation of the human soul by God. It requires careful reflection. But consider this related example. We have no trouble accepting that a human baby takes quite a length of time to be able to actualize its intellectual capacities, while the body develops enough to be an adequate channel or instrument for the expression of these higher powers. Why then should we be surprised that, when such higher powers are first infused into the body of a hitherto higher animal, it will take a much longer time for this new higher animating power to work out the evolutionary

development of the body of this new species so that it can express its powers through adequate bodily channels or instruments (for example, appropriate vocal cords), since this is the first time this type of body has had to meet this challenge? The same holds as much or perhaps more so for the slow development of the social communication skills and structures needed to express adequately in a human social context the inner life of this new immaterial power. For without the creation of a shared social language, with all the social habits that support it, it is difficult, if not impossible, for human beings to express their inner world of intellectual thought. Thus the spiritual soul could have been infused by God at any one of various locations in evolutionary history and then taken quite a long time for the necessary bodily and social structures to evolve enough to make their appearance empirically evident to us later generations so that our science can have access to them. It seems to me, therefore, that the slow emergence of the *empirical evidence* for the expression of intelligence in the history of life on this earth is no cogent objection against the earlier actual presence of this new inner capacity, not yet able to express itself in observable bodily ways—as we always naturally long to do, as *embodied spirits*. It would, in fact, be surprising if it were otherwise!

With regard to the objection brought forward by Father Ernan McMullin, distinguished Catholic philosopher of science at the University of Notre Dame, that we no longer know the limits of “matter,” hence we can no longer draw any clear limits between matter and spirit, this kind of language seems to me to involve a serious philosophical confusion. It makes perfectly good sense to say that we don’t know the limits of what an embodied being (a being with a body) can do, because we do not yet know whatever else may be in it (for example, some higher spiritual powers). But it is quite another thing to say we don’t know the limits of what we call “matter.” For we have made up this term precisely as a contrast term to indicate the inclusion in its meaning only those data subject in some way to spatial extension and quantitative measurement, at least indirectly, by us and our instruments. Whatever falls outside the scope of these restrictions—as the higher operations of mind have been shown to do—simply falls outside the meaning of this term, whether they exist or not. Of course, we cannot know ahead of time all the particular data that will fit under this horizontal ontological level of being, but to erase or blur entirely the outside methodological limits that were the purpose of the creation of the term in the first place is only to introduce confusion. When I pushed Father McMullin to indicate what the outside limits of “matter”

might be, he replied, “remaining finite being, not infinite being or God.” But this is of no use at all to distinguish material things from anything else in our finite world, including even finite spirits! So it contributes nothing at all to this present discussion!

And when I asked a physicist whether or not there were any limits to what could be included under the term “matter,” he replied at once, “Of course there are limits to the meaning of the term; the minimum is what comes under the four great forces of nature: gravity, electromagnetism, the strong force (that holds together the nucleus of the atom), and the weak force (for radioactive decay)” —all of which, of course, imply the possibility of quantitative measurement and some kind of spatial extension. If we blur or erase from the meaning of such a central term in our language as “matter” the very contrast it was made up to express between what is subject to spatial extension and quantitative measurement by us and what transcends such limits, then we will sooner or later find ourselves obliged to invent some other word to do this indispensable job for us. There is no sign yet that science requires abolishing this basic distinction, whereas there are very cogent reasons for maintaining it.

Death and Resurrection

This is the second serious philosophical flaw in the nonreductive physicalists’ position: their attempted theological explanation of death and resurrection as required by Christian biblical faith. They admit that when we die, we die totally; there is nothing left of my original uniqueness, nothing but aggregates of more elementary material particles. What then about the Resurrection at the Last Day—an essential ingredient of any authentic Christian belief? Their answer is that God “recreates” the original *me* again at the appropriate later time. But this is a metaphysical impossibility. The recreated entity might be a clone, *like* me in many ways, but not the *same* unique personal *me*, because the new unity, the self—the “I”—organizing the similar body is not the same as me, for the simple reason that it never experienced the same personal life, the same *story* with all its challenges, successes and failures, that became an inseparable part of my identity before my death. That self is simply gone, and not even the omnipotence of God can do what is a metaphysical impossibility: recreate the identical being that existed before, with no bond of continuity on the personal level between the before and the after. One obvious difficulty, of

course, against the possibility of such a recreation is that if God can recreate the same me once, why can he not do so any number of times, thus producing chaos in the heavenly kingdom, not to mention at the Last Judgment? Can it be that the ubiquity and power of the new technologies of visual duplication have lured us into believing that anything can be duplicated, even the uniqueness of a self?

At this point these thinkers abandon any attempt at philosophical explanation or intelligibility but just appeal to biblical faith and the omnipotence of God beyond anything we can imagine. But belief in the omnipotence of God cannot include belief that God can produce something unintelligible or absurd. It was precisely to avoid this metaphysical contradiction that the Greek Fathers early on in the Church insisted on the immortality of the spiritual soul as the bond of continuity of the human person between death and the resurrection. It is amazing to me to observe these obviously sincere Christian thinkers so apparently unconcerned with this glaring conflict between their reason and their faith.

In sum, what has gone wrong with this new movement of nonreductive physicalism is that it tries to have it both ways: on one side, it tries to satisfy the scientific community (represented by neuroscience) by eliminating any kind of “alien” spiritual mode of being within the human that transcends the laws of our material world and is in principle inaccessible to scientific investigation; and on the other, it tries to satisfy the exigencies of Christian biblical faith by relegating the activities proper to this faith to the status of irreducible higher properties of this lower, strictly physical nature. But we have tried to show here that not only as consistent Christian (at least Catholic) believers *and* as consistent philosophers we cannot have it both ways here. The spiritual mode of *being* cannot so easily be exiled from human reality. The only adequate description of the human person, one that does justice both to its dignity and to the splendor of its being, turns out in the end to be what Saint Thomas fought so hard to defend: we are *embodied spirits*.¹²

One last observation: it is a matter of puzzlement to me how it is that none of these thinkers ever, to my knowledge, explicitly examines the philosophical position of Saint Thomas on the soul-body union, as a dualism not of two substances but of two levels of the same richly complex substance, integrated under the one self-governing self, the “I.” Nor do they ever do a careful explicit philosophical analysis of the irreducibly immaterial character of the higher operations of human consciousness. That is the very first step of the Thomistic analysis, on which all the rest depends.

Conclusion

The reason why we have devoted so much attention to this new movement of nonreductive physicalism is that it is a movement *within Christian thought itself*, trying to come to terms in a more positive way with contemporary science, and yet ending up eroding the Christian tradition of an irreducible distinction between mind and matter, body and spiritual immortal soul—once one of the central pillars of the traditional Christian worldview, increasingly blurred in our own times, among many Protestant, but also, increasingly, some Catholic thinkers. The purpose of this article has been to show why there are no good reasons at all for abandoning or weakening this richly nourishing traditional doctrine, but very good reasons for maintaining it and rediscovering its fecundity, philosophically, theologically, psychologically, and spiritually. A “creative retrieval” of the central pillars of our rich but fragile tradition seems to be required periodically, over and over again, as history unfolds. Here seems to me to be a prime candidate for such a creative retrieval.

The Creative Imagination: Unique Expression of Our Soul-Body Unity

Introduction

My aim in this essay is to engage in a philosophical exploration of the creative imagination in human beings, seeking to discern its basic structure and its significance for our understanding of what it means to be human. For it is unique in the universe, so far as we know it, to human beings: God and angels are certainly creative, but by pure intelligence, without images; animals have imagination, but principally reproductive, to conserve images of past experience, not creative, save to a very limited degree, always tied down to present particular experiences and concrete problems. Humans, on the other hand, enjoy a far wider scope of creative imagination, partly due to the power of *human intelligence* to abstract and break free of the concrete material present we find ourselves situated in—which animals cannot do—and partly from the freedom in which our imagination participates because it is associated with the free will of the human spirit.

In addition to being unique to human beings—taking “human” in the widest sense of rational animal or embodied spirit (since there might well be other species of this kind of being in our cosmos)—the creative imagination is uniquely revealing of what it means to be human, in that it is a privileged expression of the *intrinsic unity of body and soul*—body and soul, matter and spirit, at the same time distinct from each other and constitutive of one single being, as a unity collaborating in a single act.

It is this second aspect of the creative imagination, its privileged expression of the intrinsic unity of mind and body—and more broadly, of soul

and body—that especially interests me and seems to me the most philosophically illuminating. In general I mean by “creative imagination” that power or ability that human beings have not only to store up sense images of our past experiences, but also to actively create new images never before experienced by the imaginer—or perhaps by any other person. These new images are created by either combining old images, or creatively making up entirely new ones out of the basic raw material of our experience. One can find examples of our creative imagination at work in literature, the plastic arts, technology, problem solving in various fields, including the sciences (in which there are many famous examples of new theories discovered this way), and finally the activity that has especially caught my attention and in which I have considerable experience: storytelling, in particular the telling of what are now called “wisdom stories.”

For many years in my teaching of courses on human nature, the human person, etc., in the Thomistic tradition, I never bothered much with the imagination, let alone the creative imagination, except to mention it briefly, following the tradition of most Thomists and other Scholastics, who ordinarily pay careful attention to the reproductive imagination and its role in preparing the abstraction of universal ideas, but have very little if anything to say about the creative imagination. This includes both Aristotle and Saint Thomas himself—Aquinas a little better than most on the topic, though still very terse. But in the last ten or fifteen years of my fifty-year career, I have gradually awakened to the profound importance of this distinctive aspect of human nature, both for understanding our individual selves and for understanding and promoting the healthy functioning of any living culture. My awakening was due to the following: (1) initially fortuitous encounters with a network of image therapists who used creative visualization to improve health (both physical and psychic) and public performances of all kinds, including athletics, public speaking, and even medical practice; (2) my reflection on the now widely recognized role of creative imagination in scientific and technological discovery; (3) encounters with psychologists studying the indispensable role of imagination in moral development—you can’t learn how to act morally towards others unless you use your imagination to put yourself in the shoes of other persons and creatively imagine how you would feel if you were treated in such and such a way as you are planning to do to them; and (4) my general reflections on the work of psychologists studying the central importance of storytelling, specifically the telling of “wisdom stories,” for the healthy

development of the psychological and moral character of both young people and a whole culture, including the identification of the distinctive traits of what is now called “narrative thinking” as opposed to other modes of rational thinking.

The acts of the creative imagination show in a special way the *intrinsic unity of the human mind and body*, of spirit and matter, and a model of the human being precisely as embodied spirit, a model best grounded in Saint Thomas’s vision of the unity of human nature. This is because the act of the creative imagination is a single act performed by collaboration of the two great complementary poles of human activity, soul and body. Such an act is not produced by either the sense powers or the intellect alone, or one after the other, but indissolubly both together, in an image or set of images shot through with the light of intelligence that expresses itself not apart from, but precisely in and through the images. The *unity* of the product of the creative imagination is obvious—implying the unity of the act that produced it—but the irreducibly *dipolar* origin of the act as involving both body and soul also shines forth for the attentive philosopher willing to probe beyond the surface.

I am taking a stand here against many rationalist thinkers, for whom the products of the creative imagination are merely confused ideas on the way to their ideal completion as clear and distinct ideas. On the contrary, the fruits of the creative imagination are not a stage to be gotten beyond and left behind, but a unique expression of the very being of the human person as *embodied* spirit, and so to be cherished and nurtured as an irreplaceable aspect of authentic human development.

The creative imagination best fulfills its role for healthy human development only when it serves *under the guidance*—as its handmaiden, so to speak—of *the light of intelligence*, or of what we might better call the wisdom of the soul, since this includes both free will and the emotions. In so doing, we reject as inadequate and dangerous the opposing thesis put forward by particular Romantic thinkers, echoed by certain philosophers, psychologists, and psychoanalysts today, that the creative imagination is a completely autonomous power, quite independent of, even opposed to, reason, acknowledging no master or guide beyond itself, since it is the original source, impenetrable to reason, of all the products of reason itself. There are important moral implications involved here. For if the activity of the creative imagination is not carried on under the guidance and illumination of reason ordered towards the good, since it has no conscience or power of judgment on its own, it can easily be taken over from below

by our uncontrolled passions and instincts, from within by evil designs of the will, or from without by the absorption of seductive but ambivalent or dehumanizing images projected onto us by various media channels not under our control. Vivid images have a peculiar power of weaving a spell over embodied spirits like ourselves—both for good and evil.

A survey of the history of philosophy reveals that the question of the nature and value of the creative imagination in human beings turns out to be a *sign of contradiction* among philosophers, evoking strongly opposed opinions on several points. One's position as to this question thus serves as a touchstone of one's more fundamental position on the nature of the union between body and soul, or what it means to be authentically human. I have been much helped in this latter exploration by the recently published and extremely valuable summa on the imagination by Eva Brann's *The World of the Imagination*.¹

I would like to use as my paradigm example of the creative imagination at work what are commonly called "wisdom stories," since I am more familiar and personally involved with them as an amateur storyteller myself. The defining traits of a wisdom story are that first, it is a genuine story with a surprise ending; second, it is centered around a genuine human individual (not a stylized type, as in Aesop's *Fables*, or a superhuman or divine figure, as in creation myths); and third, it incorporates some bit of *wisdom for the human journey* arising out of the collective wisdom of a particular culture. Thus usually it is attributed to no particular author, but is handed down by word-of-mouth from generation to generation (no one knows from when or where) and embodies the collective wisdom of the people, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, for example. Occasionally—but rarely successfully, to my mind—one finds a wisdom story deliberately made up by a known author (such as the well-known "The Happy Prince," by Oscar Wilde). It is by such stories, involving heroes that can be admired and imitated—or the opposite—that the youth of all the older cultures (not just the preliterate ones) have been traditionally initiated into moral training. This potent "way of stories" is unfortunately diminishing in the educational practice of our own time, both at home and in school, its place taken by the television screen—a medium that substitutes ready-made images produced by someone else and received passively by the viewer instead of being actively elicited by the creative imagination of the listener. I also choose the wisdom story as my medium of exploration because it illustrates so vividly the intrinsic collaboration of both mind and body.

Let me present as a classic example of the genre this brief wisdom story from Africa, one of their many examples of teaching ethical lessons by story. The chief in a certain village announced that he would give a feast for the men of the village. He would provide the food, but he asked each man to bring a bottle of palm wine, which would then be poured into the great bowl and shared by all as a symbol of their common bond. So Mbutu went home and told his wife about the invitation. "Oh, that's fine. I'm happy for you," she said. "Well, the food is fine," he replied, "but I don't have any palm wine and it is expensive." "Oh, that's all right, we can manage," she said. "I know what I'll do: I'll fill my jar with water, pour it in, and no one will know the difference." The jars were opaque. "Oh no, don't do that; you might get in trouble." "Look, I'm a man, I'm smart, you're only a woman." So that's what he did: filled his jar with water, marched down and poured it into the great common bowl like all the others, feeling pretty good about his cleverness. Then the chief said: "Now we will all drink a toast and then share the feast." So everyone dipped his cup into the common bowl, and then drank. A gasp ran through the whole assembly: there was only water in every cup!

Every one had made the same decision: the *other people* will do the right thing, so I'll be able to get away with it and save myself some money! Result: social disaster! Moral: If everyone followed this principle—and if one, why not all?—then moral chaos! This is not the way for a good person, a wise person, to act!

Creative Imagination as Expression of the Intrinsic Unity of Soul and Body

What is so special about this product of the creative imagination is that it is rooted in two *distinct* but *inseparable* poles of the human psyche: on the one hand, it is clearly rooted in the body by its concrete sense imagery of a particular human experience in space and time; on the other, it is clearly rooted in the intellectual part of the soul (both intellect and will), because of the universal principle that unmistakably shines forth through it for anyone equipped with the use of reason (children from about six on get it right away). The idea just simply shines in and through the image. It is not as though there were two distinct contents of the story: one the idea, the other the imagery; one part in the mind, the result of an act of the mind; the other part in the body, the act of the senses or the simple sensory

imagination. The two are fused together in a single act and single product, precisely as *an idea incarnated in an image*, that is, the expression of an embodied spirit, grasped all at once as a meaning shining through a manifold of images and held as one in the unity of human consciousness, which is simultaneously intellectual and sensible.

We can indeed, if we wish, abstract out the intellectual truth embedded in the story and think about it, discuss it. But this is not at all the same as the experience of seeing the two fused together, the idea shining through the image, the soul expressing itself through the body. This disembodied truth, this wisdom for the journey expressed in an abstract proposition, can indeed be recognized as true. But it does not engage us deeply at all the levels of our being—intellectual, sensible, emotional—and it does not move us to action, at least not nearly so directly and spontaneously, as does the same truth incarnated in the story. This is especially true for children and young people, but it holds significantly for all of us adults too. It is no wonder that most of the great religions of the world proclaim their basic message first through a story, then through a creed of some kind. Thus in Christianity first comes the *story* of Jesus, only later the *creed*, with its propositions distilled one by one out of the foundational story.

Why is this? It seems to me that precisely because our very being is to be embodied spirits it is connatural for us to try to express what we know with our intellect in some way also through our body, to *incarnate*, so to speak, *what is spiritual in us in matter*. Thus if my soul is happy, it is natural for me to express it by dancing, or singing, or just smiling; if it is sad, by weeping or looking glum. In acquiring my truths about reality I have to work hard with the resources of my intelligence, trying to think things out and think them through to their intelligible conclusions; and if these are challenged, I must meet the challenge by rational arguments, not just by presenting images: one cannot solve a dispute about the truth just by telling different stories to each other. But once one has gotten hold of some truth, especially an important one, it is natural for us to want to express it, both to ourselves and especially to others, by enlisting the body to clothe it in some vivid image or story that will move the other to share it and appreciate it as we do.

This is partly because images are naturally more emotion laden than abstract ideas or propositions and hence more effective in getting our attention and moving us to action. Almost all images, it seems, have a certain aura of feelings, of emotions, attached to them, whether positive or negative, and do not leave us indifferent, detached, or even bored, as we can be

by purely abstract ideas. To hear abstractly that the situation of poor people in a city is deplorable will be registered by us, but will not move us immediately; whereas to see a photo or hear a story told about a ragged, skeleton-like child eating food from a garbage dump is much more likely to galvanize us into action to do something about it.

But as we search more profoundly for the roots of all this, we discover that it is deeply consonant with Saint Thomas's strong philosophical affirmation of the *intrinsic unity of body and soul in human beings*, that these are not two substances somehow extrinsically connected, nor is the spiritual soul imprisoned in the body, but there is a connatural intrinsic union between them that is good and necessary for the soul itself, as well as the body, in order to fulfill their *shared* human destiny as an *embodied spirit* on a journey toward final fulfillment in union with God. It follows naturally, Saint Thomas tells us, that the distinctive mode of human knowing in operation will reflect the distinctive mode of human being on the deeper level of its nature. He does not hesitate to draw the conclusion (that shocked his more conservative Augustinian colleagues at the University of Paris at the time, including Saint Bonaventure), namely: "I answer that, in the state of the present life, in which the soul is united to a corruptible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning [or 'converting itself'] to phantasms [images in the imagination]."² Our intellectual knowing, therefore, must always start by bouncing off some image held in the imagination. But once in possession of this initial knowledge abstracted from matter, the intellect can follow the trail of its deficient intelligibility all the way back through the chain of its causes to its ultimate spiritual Source. It is precisely our search for the meaning of matter, "led by the hand by material things" (*manuducimur*), as he puts it in a graphic image, that leads us to the heights of spirit—a distinctive human journey, Thomas remarks, that is "a longer way" (*longior via*) than that of the angels.

It was this tying the intellect so closely to the senses in human knowing that so upset the more "spiritual minded" Augustinians of his day, who felt that Aquinas was undermining the spiritual nobility of the human soul by which we are primarily constituted as images of God. Thus a key doctrine of Saint Bonaventure was that the human soul had "two faces": one, the Aristotelian, that faced downward towards the world of matter, to abstract their intelligible natures; the other, the Augustinian, that looked directly upward into the world of spirit, to know its own spiritual soul, the angels, and God.³ Saint Thomas equivalently replied: "Sorry, the human

soul has only one face. It cannot look directly into the world of spirit; it must first look down into the world of matter and then be led back by the chain of causality [*reductio ad causas*] to the higher world of spirit.” We should understand, of course, that Thomas is here speaking only of the natural mode of human knowing. He readily admits that in mystical experience God can supernaturally “touch” the soul directly from within and infuse spiritual ideas into it without passing through sense images. Saint Augustine, the source for Saint Bonaventure, never distinguished that clearly between the natural and supernatural orders. Saint Thomas also admits the immediate concomitant knowledge by the human soul of itself as knower and source of its actions—not by abstraction or inference—but only once activated by initially attending, however briefly, to some image in the imagination as its springboard, so to speak.⁴

It becomes easy to understand, then, that just as the way up for human knowing must pass through the senses to arrive at intellectually understood truth, so on the way down from its own intelligent possession of some truth or inherited wisdom to expressing and sharing this with another human being we should naturally seek to reclothe our abstracted wisdom in some vivid imagery that will resonate more powerfully and naturally within the whole being, soul and body, of the other person. To do this one must call upon the creative imagination, since neither the communicator nor the receiver is having a present sensory experience from which to abstract it. The wisdom story is a wonderfully apt way of expressing and passing down my own or my culture’s inherited wisdom, reclothed by the creative imagination in the language of an engaging story, to a receiver who is also a body-soul knower. And what is essential to grasp here is that this product of the creative imagination, the story, is taken in as a whole all at once—not first the images, then the meaning abstracted from it—but the idea shining in and through the concrete image-complex of the story itself, that is, an idea not abstracted from, but incarnate in, an image. We in the West often like to reflect on the story afterwards and formulate abstractly the universal truth embedded therein. But in many oral cultures, apparently, such as the Native American, they do not like to do that. They say the meaning is *in the story*, and should not be separated out, for life itself is a story!

Another important evidence that reveals the role of the intellectual soul at work within the creative imagination is the *freedom* involved in the creative combination or construction of new images, such as mermaids, giants, elves, and other worlds entirely (as in science fiction). Animals seem

to have a limited creativity of imagination in making up new ways to solve present practical problems—an Australian friend of mine insists his sheep dog constantly amazes him by its creativity in solving problems of herding sheep. But this undeniable imaginative creativity is always limited to solving present practical problems. Our human creativity of imagination seems to have an unlimited range of creation of new images for the sheer joy or thrill of it, independently of any immediate practical problem. But such wide-ranging freedom, transcending any immediate present of space and time, is a distinctive mark of the spiritual will, linked directly with its sister faculty of the soul, intelligence itself.

In sum, transcendence over space, time, and material particularity of context, plus unlimited freedom of creativity in the combination or construction of images, are thus the hallmark of the human creative imagination, and a privileged expression of the intrinsic unity of soul and body in a product that manifests the integrated collaboration of both levels of our human nature at once in a unique human artifact.

*The Relation of the Imagination to Intelligence:
Imagination as the Handmaid of the Mind*

The next point I would like to focus on is the relation of this distinctive human power of creative imagination to human intelligence and the life of the mind and will. Philosophers have held quite different views on this, as one can see in the historical record. We are taking special issue with those, like some of the Romantic thinkers both of the past and the present, who hold that the creative imagination is a radically autonomous power, quite independent of, even opposed to, the life of reason, and acknowledging no obedience to or guidance by anything other than itself, as it surges up from a rationally impenetrable abyss of creativity.

What I would like to propose, on the contrary, is that, just as there is a hierarchical relation between the soul and the body, with the spiritual soul giving life to the body, guiding it and determining its destiny by the soul's intelligence and free will, so that the body can be said to be *for* the soul, so too there should be a parallel relation between the creative imagination and the higher powers of the soul, its intelligence and free will, so that the imagination is *at the service* of the intelligence, the handmaid of the mind, so to speak, and is designed to function most fruitfully in that subordinate role. For the imagination in general, including the creative imagination,

does not have the ability on its own to make *value judgments*, to set goals and make choices among them, nor does it have a *moral conscience* on its own. It is a “worker on assignment,” so to speak. It is as though it were saying to the person: “Don’t ask me to make decisions. Tell me what you want achieved and I’ll try my best to give it effective imaginative expression.” Thus creative imagination, if so directed, will work to produce an imaginative expression of religious devotion; but also, if so directed, it will produce an imaginative plan or set of images to seduce someone; it is a “gun for hire,” so to speak. If given no direction, it will tend to spin idly, be passively and uncritically molded by suggestive influences from without, or be open to programming by our spontaneous lower instinctual drives and passions from within, particularly by the ever-present and powerful sexual drive, not to mention our other instinctual drives towards immediate sensual self-satisfaction. It has often been noted by spiritual guides down the ages, including Saint Thomas, that when we are in the grip of strong passions, the imagination tends to be drawn in by the passions to give more vivid expression to them; the ground for this is the natural bond of affinity or sympathetic resonance between all the sense powers, rooted in the unity of the body informed by the living soul.⁵

The same general thesis of the close link of the creative imagination with reason is proposed in considerable detail by a number of classic treatments of the role of the imagination in the time of the Renaissance, which witnessed an explosion of new interest in the imagination as the locus of the creative side of the human person as the center of the universe and a unique image of God. Thus Pico della Mirandola’s *On the Imagination*, from the last quarter of the fifteenth century, lays out the common theme that the imagination is the “medium,” or the “messenger,” between the corporeal and the incorporeal aspects of human nature and hence is difficult for philosophy to grasp.⁶ Thus the “phantasy” or creative imagination is two-faced. It can turn away from reason towards the sensual instincts and passions, thus becoming “irrational and devoid of correct judgment, and responsible for the depravity and evil that Holy Writ reminds us we are prone to.” Or it can turn towards reason, opening itself to be illumined and guided by the inborn God-given light of reason that makes us to be images of God—which Pico tends to identify with the light of faith in God. It can then be a true helper towards the final beatitude of the human pilgrim, but only if all the images of the imagination are interpreted in the light of the believing intellect, without which light they are in danger of turning into mere seductive illusions.⁷

Thus for Aquinas and a whole tradition of philosophers defending a holistic view of the human person, the creative imagination takes on full intelligibility only when seen as one power of a unified human nature proper to an embodied spirit on a journey through the material world towards final union with the infinite fullness of truth, goodness, and beauty in God towards which it is destined. But it must always be kept in mind that this integration of the creative imagination into the overall finality of the human person as embodied spirit, of body at the service of spirit in its journey through the material world, is by no means *automatic*, beyond the need of conscious control by the spirit, like breathing or the beating of the heart. Like many of the other sense dynamisms in us, it is unstable, two-faced, capable of operating at the service of reason but also of opening itself to the control of the quasi-autonomous drives of the sensate body, or even control by our deliberate evil desires. So this natural integration into our flawed human nature, wounded by original sin as Christian tradition teaches, is not to be taken for granted as a simple given, but is an achievement that must be consciously worked out by deliberate self-discipline, helped by the example and teaching of others. This can also be significantly helped, or hindered, by influences emanating from the surrounding culture, since we humans are all molded by both *nature* and *culture*. In a word, the imagination, especially the creative imagination, makes an *excellent servant* of reason and the life of the spirit, but a *poor, even dangerous, master*.

At this point an important warning must be introduced to guard against a serious misinterpretation of the subordination of imagination to the rule of reason which would effectively do away with the *irreducible* mystery that lies at the heart of the inner working of the creative imagination. For just *how* the latter actually does its work seems to resist stubbornly all attempts of rational intelligence to analyze it in depth in terms of any system of clear rational categories transparent to self-conscious reason. This is all too clearly evidenced by the paradoxical and often mutually conflicting attempts of philosophers to produce rational explanations of this unique phenomenon throughout the history of Western philosophy.

The spiritual soul, through its intellectual powers, is indeed at work in the activity of creative imagining, but it is working through a sense power with roots in the body, and the ontological juncture between the two is hidden from direct intellectual inspection. The creative work seems to go on just *below the level of consciousness* in what Maritain and others have called the “creative subconscious” (the seat of poetic imagination). This might

be likened, by an analogous stretching of an image, to a “creative” (life-giving, nurturing) womb out of which fresh new images emerge into the light of consciousness when they are ready; still, the light of conscious reason cannot penetrate directly into the obscure inner depths of the creative womb itself as it works in silence, but must wait till its offspring are born into the light. A spiritual intelligence embodied in matter must learn to be humble and not try to be too bossy in working with its junior partner.

It follows that reason cannot directly dictate to the creative imagination just what it should produce or how it should do its work. The most it can do is to enlist the creative imagination into the project or problem the intellect is concerned with, to envelop it, so to speak, within the light of the *intellect's own intentionality* stretched towards a desired goal. For certain kinds of creative work it may help if the intellect first formulates clearly just what the problem is that it wants to solve or the general aim it wishes to achieve. But then it must leave it to the partly autonomous initiative of the imagination itself just how it is going to carry out its mission, what new images or new combinations of old images it is going to produce to achieve this end. It seems that the creative imagination works most efficiently at the service of reason when the latter orients it toward goals to be achieved, even if only very general ones, but does not try to dictate to it the means to achieve them. *Goals—yes, means—no.*

Philosophers have often tried to probe more deeply into the creative process itself and explain it by reduction to more rational patterns, but without much success, and not infrequently with disastrous results: the baby ends up being thrown out with the bath water or is artificially mutated beyond recognition—as can be seen in the history of philosophy. This difficulty of self-conscious reason to deal adequately in terms of its own abstract categories with this unique phenomenon of the creative imagination as the interface between mind and body should not surprise us if we hold firmly in mind that the acts of the creative imagination are not originated solely by a sense power, or solely by an intellectual power, or by both in temporal sequence. Rather they are the hybrid products of an *intrinsic synthesis of mind and body* working together as a unitary agent that gives characteristic expression to the natural unity of the human being as embodied spirit. Such a new intermediary level of being would indeed allow for a *descriptive phenomenology* of the creative process (we have many such today), but elude further rational *philosophical explanation*.

We might add here that the almost limitless range of *freedom* manifested by the creative imagination in humans is another clear sign of the immanence of spirit working within sense; for freedom does not originate from matter or sense as such but is the mark of the spiritual faculty of intellect-associated will, which transcends the limits of any materially anchored context.

With regard to this same dimension of mystery of the creative process that eludes the probing of reason, there is another bit of evidence that we must pay attention to, even though it shrouds the creative process in even deeper mystery. This is the witness given by so many creative writers and other artists—many to me personally on my questioning them. They maintain that when they move into a really high creative stage something mysterious happens to them. They produce something that when they reflect on it afterwards surprises them: “Did I do that? I wonder where that came from? It didn’t seem to come just from me.” It felt, they say, as though they were tuned in or connected to some higher power which somehow took over and flowed through them at that moment. This experience recurs so consistently down the ages that I think we must take it seriously. Could it perhaps be the case that our connection and intimacy with the higher powers of the universe, whether the created spirit world or God himself, or possibly even some higher spiritual level of our souls, not below but above, our ordinary zone of self-consciousness (a spiritual *supraconscious* level, as some hold), is much closer than we thought, and it is possible under special conditions to break through the veils that separate us and plug in directly to these higher sources of spiritual energy and light? It seems to me by no means improbable. So we must leave this open as a possible, even probable, factor in the total equation, whatever the rational explanation of this phenomenon may ultimately be.

Principal Roles of the Creative Imagination

We shall examine here the roles only of the *creative imagination* at the service of the human spirit, not all the roles of the faculty of imagination, such as its basic function in all human knowledge as a link between the input of the external senses and the abstraction of universal ideas from them by the intellect, and its role in memory as the storehouse of images once gathered, to be used for future reference or as material for the creation of new images. All these are standard themes already familiar enough

from their careful analysis in the traditions of Aristotle, Saint Thomas, and not a few others.

The role of the *creative imagination*, on the other hand, has not been given the same explicit, detailed attention in this tradition, even by most contemporary successors of Aquinas. *Aristotle* indicates clearly the presence of this power in the human soul, but never gets around to treating it in any detail. *Saint Thomas* does better, indicating its connatural relation to human intelligence and some of its roles in assisting the latter. But we have to wait until the Renaissance and later for the emergence into philosophical consciousness of the full richness and mysterious depths of this extraordinary gift of God to this unique order of being that is the human person as *embodied spirit*, *microcosm* of the whole universe.

THE DRIVE TOWARD THE INCARNATION OF IDEA IN IMAGE

The first service that creative imagination can do for the embodied human spirit is to give expression to our fundamental natural drive or impulse toward *incarnation* in or through the body—that is, in images—of whatever of significance is already present in some way in us on the level of spirit, that is, mind, will, or heart. This includes significant truths or insights, especially illuminations of wisdom for the meaning of life and the human journey, which we have come to discover or to realize more profoundly, even more so if they have triggered strong resonances in our emotions. It is connatural to us to want to incarnate these, to make them overflow into our bodies and resonate there too so that the whole human composite may vibrate in harmony over something that concerns it deeply. So it is natural for humans all over the world, in all cultures—so far as we know—to create wisdom stories that use the creative imagination to give expression in concrete, individualized story images to some significant bit of wisdom for the human journey that has emerged out of the reflective experience of the social group. Such creatively generated stories are given explicit formulation by the elders or wise ones of the community and passed down from one generation to another, as part of the “community wisdom.” In fact, the same spontaneous tendency toward incarnation in bodily images occurs when any strong emotion emerges within our psyche, usually connected as it is with some significant cognitive content. The mode of expression can range over a wide spectrum: story, dance, song, music, painting, whatever.

Saint Thomas speaks with sympathetic appreciation of this incarnational mode of human self-expression when answering the question why

Scripture makes use of metaphors and imaginative representations so much in its teaching: “I answer that it is befitting Holy Scripture to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things. For God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature. Now it is natural to humans to attain to intellectual truths through sensible things, because all our knowledge originates from sense. To Obj. 1: Sacred doctrine makes use of metaphors as both necessary and useful . . . for it is natural for man to be pleased with [imaginative] representations.”⁸

There is another motive at work beyond the impulse to self-expression in this natural human tendency toward incarnating our dearly held truths and ideals in creative imagery. Effective orators and leaders in all fields—political, moral, religious—have known and practiced the following truth since far back in human history: the most effective, if not the only effective, way to move most people to action for some cause is to propose to them some concrete model they can *see* in their imagination and be drawn to *admire* and *imitate*. Presenting ideals and motives in abstract ideas is not usually enough to move us to action. We must be led to see in our imagination our own selves actually carrying out the desired actions. It is this imaginative rehearsal of our own participation that seems to be most effective for actually moving us to pass from idea to action, as when the speaker ends by saying, for example, “And you too could be like that, act like that!”

THE DRIVE TOWARD CREATIVE EXPANSION OF THE REAL WORLD

The role of the creative imagination outlined above as giving expression to our natural tendency to incarnate ideas in images was understood well enough by the ancients and medievals, as is evident in their rich oratorical tradition and the luxuriant medieval artistic imagination in many fields. But this second role, to give expression to our equally natural drive to *expand* the *limited boundaries* of the real world in which we presently live by *creating something really new*, never experienced by humans before, and thus to enhance human life—though certainly understood and practiced by both ancients and medievals (the soaring Gothic cathedral is one of the most magnificent examples in human history)—did not seem to be explored and reflected upon explicitly and with such enthusiasm as burst forth in the Renaissance and continued to blossom out in later modern thought in both healthy and unhealthy ways. This new turn of consciousness coincided with the emergence of the new humanism and the enthusiastic rediscovery of the natural grandeur and dignity of the human as the

center and fulfillment of the natural world and as image of the divine creativity itself through the limitless possibilities of one's creative imagination, but always under the guidance of intelligence and in imitation of God as the supremely Wise Creator.

The destiny of the human person was now oriented less toward coming to know and appreciate the real world *as it is* in all its built-in order and beauty, and conforming ourselves as far as possible to the *already established order* of nature, thus fulfilling the potentialities of our nature, elevated by God's further supernatural gifts. Such was the primary emphasis of *medieval humanism* and still included in the new humanism. But the focus of vision now shifted more toward the future, the power of the human actor to *transform what is*, what is already given, by the creative power of his imagination into something *new and richer* than was ever seen before—*homo magus*, man the magician working as apprentice in imitation of God the Supreme creative Magician. Human actors, aware as never before of the richness of their own created creativity, now see themselves poised at the moving frontier between the *limited actual* and the *far wider possible world*, pregnant with almost unlimited possibilities which they could make explicit by their creative imagination and make actual by their intelligence and will. Thus they could continually expand the richness and horizons of the real world as humanity moves through it. Einstein himself often remarked that his initial breakthrough in relativity theory was triggered by the free play of his creative imagination, and that he considered imagination "as the most important factor in human thinking."⁹

This is indeed a magnificent vision of the dignity and destiny of humanity and of the role and power of the creative imagination, and thus a *significant enrichment* of the already rich medieval vision—as long, that is, as the creative imagination remains integrated into the overall unity of an embodied spirit at the service of the life of the spirit. This new impulse towards creativity found expression in many different ways as the modern period unfolded: first in new forms of art, architecture, and literature, then later in new forms of political life, but above all in the immense explosion of creativity, inseparable from the creative imagination, that burst forth in the field of technological invention under the stimulus of the new science and its utopian dreams of controlling the material world for the enhancement of human living. The resulting transformation of the material, political, and cultural life of twentieth century humanity, at least in the developed world, compared to the late-medieval world, has indeed been spectacular, fueling the modern myth of indefinite *progress* as the destiny

of humanity and expanding dramatically the horizon of what people today consider the legitimate *expectations* of the human person for a fulfilled life. However, it is not at all clear that the overall happiness or contentment of people has improved or even changed that much in anything like a comparable proportion.

But all this is well enough known to all my readers. What I would like to distill from all this is (1) the fundamental change in attitude of the typical modern reflective person with respect to his or her relations to the past and the future and what one would consider the most characteristic traits of his or her modern psyche, and (2) the central role of the creative imagination in this new self-understanding.

Let's take the first point first. Whereas *medieval man* tended to take as his point of reference for evaluating the quality of his life his loyalty and *faithfulness to continuing the traditions of his ancestors*, to "what has been handed down" (*quod traditum est*), *modern man* looks rather toward the future, focused on how he can improve on the past, create something new, move humanity beyond its past and present limits: he is *forward-looking* rather than *backward-looking*: what *new* can I contribute? Painting in very broad strokes, I think he might describe what he considers the most characteristic traits of his psyche as *reflective self-consciousness*, *personal freedom*, and *creativity*.

As for the second point, central in this awareness of his creativity, which he and his culture so highly value, precisely because it looks towards the future, is his awareness of the power and key role of the *creative imagination* in the exercise of this creativity, so much so that there is a tendency among philosophers, as they mirror this cultural attitude, to exalt the creative imagination itself so highly that it tends to replace the role of reason itself as the highest human faculty, or at least to take on a radical autonomy and independence with respect to any guidance of reason or subordination to its rule.

THE ROLE OF CREATIVE IMAGINATION IN MORAL BEHAVIOR

Perhaps it has always been known intuitively by mature moral people, but in recent years it has also become explicitly and widely recognized by psychologists that the use of the creative imagination plays an indispensable role in mature moral behavior. The reason is that most moral behavior has to do with how we treat other people; but it is impossible to know how to do this adequately unless we exercise empathy, that is, imagine

what it would feel like if somebody treated me the way I am planning to treat this other person. Otherwise, I can remain simply unaware of how I might be hurting or offending the other person by my behavior. This empathy can be experienced only by some use of the creative imagination. Hence the new emphasis on empathy training for children. No imagination equals no mature morality!

We have laid out above our own basic philosophical vision of what place the creative imagination has as integrated into the total unity of the human person as embodied spirit, operating ideally under the guidance and rule of reason, and following the basic inspiration of Saint Thomas. But the actual history of how philosophers have treated the creative imagination in Western thought is quite different than this balanced synthesis; it is rather a fascinating and unpredictable sequence of varying evaluations, from extremely positive to extremely negative, which deserves a separate article of its own.

I would like to end with a simple but striking example of the creative imagination doing what it does best: producing an image that fuses together idea and sense in one, where the idea shines forth luminously in the image itself. It comes from a twelve-year-old girl in a religion class discussion about prayer. When asked, "What do you do when you pray?", the girl answered: "When I pray, I make like a flower before God."

Historical Postscript

The history of the nature and roles of the imagination, especially the creative aspect of it, is a fascinating and conflicted story in Western thought, swinging from one extreme of suspicion of it as a threat to reason, to the other of exaltation of it as autonomous, opposed, even superior to reason.¹⁰

The Creative Imagination as Treated in Western Thought

The companion article on this topic (see chapter 14) has treated the nature and role of the creative imagination in Thomistic anthropology. But this balanced synthesis has by no means been the dominant theme in the actual history of how this topic has been treated in the history of Western thought. There it has undergone a fascinating and unpredictable history of ups and downs in diverse evaluations from one extreme to another. We present here the main phases of this development.

Ancient and Medieval

The common note of this period is the firm subordination of the creative imagination to the rule of reason. Plato is well known for drawing the line sharply between philosophy and poetry and threatening to banish the poets from his ideal *Republic* as tending to bewitch the minds especially of the young by illusory images and turn them away from the disciplined search for true wisdom found in the “really real,” the eternal, immutable world of Ideas or pure intelligible forms beyond the unstable world of sense.¹ Plato does in fact allow for the use of images under the strict control of reason to construct myths clearly recognized as such to explore where the human intellect cannot yet see clearly, and shows brilliantly by example how to do this—for example, in the Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*,² and elsewhere. But he is passionately opposed to allowing the creative imagination to spin out imaginary stories on its own and present them as though they were true, as the poets do in inventing stories about the gods and the like. The imagination can be useful as a humble servant

of reason, helping it to know the real, at least in the later Plato, but its creative power (*phantasia*, later “fancy”), operating on its own initiative independently of the rule of reason, is held in deep suspicion as a weaver of illusions, prone to stimulate the passions, and bewitch the mind, especially of the young, away from the search for what alone truly *is*, the world of Ideal Forms. And the reason is always the same: it is a weaver of fictions, of what *is not*, not of what *is*.

Aristotle is much more friendly to the imagination, assigning it a crucial role as the link between the human intellect and the world of material things, since all our human ideas must first begin in sense images from which the active intellect abstracts the immanent intelligible forms constituting its universal ideas, and with which it must maintain constant contact all the while it actively thinks its abstracted ideas. This role of the reproductive imagination as preparer of the sense images for abstraction, and storehouse of the same in memory when the sense experience is over, is well and carefully developed by Aristotle and plays a central role in his theory of knowledge, quite different from that of Plato. In this role it is quite clearly connected with the real, since it is only within sensible things, for Aristotle, that the intelligible forms actually subsist as real natures. This doctrine is too well known to need repeating here. It is the creative imagination which is my special concern. Here is where the difficulties start.

Aristotle is quite explicit in recognizing *another role of the imagination*, its power to recombine already existing images *creatively*, with a certain spontaneity or freedom, to form new sense images not found in or deriving from the real world of sensible things at all, although he does not think a separate faculty is needed for this. This is brought in suddenly, in the midst of his formal discussion of imagination in the *De Anima*.³ But the topic is dropped almost as soon as it is introduced. Aristotle merely records the existence of this power as a fact required for an accurate description of what goes on in human knowing, without any disapproval or criticism, such as was found in Plato, save for the warning that the products of this power can be either true or false, but more often false, although the imagination itself cannot discern which. But there is no further discussion of it here, nor is the matter taken up elsewhere, although there is a brief discussion of the imagination in the little work *On Memory and Recollection*.⁴ Some suspect it was supposed to have been the subject of another dialogue, either lost or never written.

The Greek writer Cornelius Castoriadis, in his detailed, insightful, deeply challenging—and controversial—analysis of Aristotle’s teaching on the imagination in his article “The Discovery of the Imagination,” maintains that “the movement that seizes hold of Aristotle in the second half of the final book of the *De Anima* . . . carries him towards the discovery of another imagination situated at a much more profound stratum than the one he had already spoken about . . . But this had to remain without sequel, not only in the treatise itself but also in the history of philosophy, until the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781.”⁵ Aristotle opens the door to a whole new dimension of creativity in human knowing, pregnant with immense possibilities for a new understanding of the human that will begin to blossom in Western thought only after Kant. But Aristotle himself did not walk through this door that he had opened. Unwilling or unable? Hard to say, although there is no dearth of intriguing speculations.⁶

Plotinus and Neoplatonism add a more positive interpretation of the creative imagination as not just rising up from below reason to distract it from the real—as in Plato—but also as descending by an emanation from above. Just as the World Soul spins out time as the moving image of eternity expressed in the world of matter, so too it emanates *spatialized mathematical images* (geometrical figures which human mathematicians can draw) of the higher pure intelligible Forms of Numbers in the intelligible world, to help humans work out the geometrical theorems hidden implicitly within the eternal properties of numbers. Something similar will surface again in Descartes. Also, because of the openness of the imagination to the spirit world above it, Plotinus is able to rescue *authentic art* from its Platonic banishment and assign it a considerably higher value. The true artist, like the sculptor Phidias, did not copy his great statue of Zeus from some existing material model known by the senses. Rather he looked upward with his mind’s eye to contemplate the eternal Ideal Form of Man and then reproduced it in a purified sense image more perfect than the merely material models found on this earth. Artistic forms are *more beautiful* and noble than earthly ones, since they image directly the Ideal Forms shining in the world of Ideas. The same is true of *music*, where the musician listens carefully to catch the eternal heavenly harmonies and then reproduces them directly in harmonies audible to the senses, more perfect than any that can be heard from nature here below. That is the whole secret of Byzantine liturgical music, as well as of sacred icons, the creation of which must be preceded by three days of prayer and contemplation. The Neoplatonist Synesius, a contemporary of St. Augustine, even posited

an “imaginary spirit” (*phantastikon pneuma*) that hovered between the realms of spirit and matter to mediate the former to the latter for humans living on the frontier of both!⁷

Saint Thomas follows closely the basic Aristotelian doctrine of the *re-productive imagination* as a link between the world of sensible things and our sense intellects with their power of intellectual insight into the intelligible forms immanent in our sense images. But, like Aristotle, he is very terse on the *creative imagination* and its role. He does clearly identify it, as the power to freely reconstruct or recombine old images to make new ones, yet he rejects the view of Avicenna that a distinct new faculty of the soul must be posited to explain its activity.⁸ But he provides no systematic development of the topic. He does, however, make four isolated comments that are quite positive about the service that the creative imagination can provide for reason or the danger to it.

1. The most effective way to teach others is not to provide them with ready-made abstracted universal ideas, but to present to them concrete examples in images from which they themselves can actively abstract the intelligible meanings, for this is our most natural way of human knowing.⁹

2. “The sensitive part of the soul is made more powerful by being joined with the intellectual [*efficitur virtuosior*: can we not stretch this a bit to include ‘more creative’?]”¹⁰

3. Because of its link with other sense powers, the imagination is open to being influenced from below against the rule of reason by the passions, especially if the latter are strongly aroused; they tend to attract the imagination to operate in their service instead of that of reason.¹¹

4. The imagination does not only present to the mind images deriving from sense experience, but also “transmutes” them in various ways under its own power, such as happens in dreams, but also under the command of reason, which arranges the phantasms provided by the imagination in order to help it better understand something, thus stimulating the mind to abstract new intelligible forms from these newly ordered images.¹² This terse but undeveloped statement seems to me to be pregnant with a deep reservoir of implications for a considerably richer highlighting of the creative side of human knowing, and a lightning flash of insight into how intellect and imagination work together creatively to actually produce new intellectual insights. But Thomas does not develop this further.

It does remain, however, I think we must admit, that Aquinas and other medieval thinkers, as well as Aristotle and the classical Greek philosophers

in general, were all primarily oriented in the intention of their philosophical work more toward the fullest possible understanding of the real world already given them by God as a fixed, unchanging order than in creating something truly new, that is, in expressing their participation in God's own creativity as an intrinsic part of their human dignity under God, as would become the focus later in the Renaissance. As Richard Kearney sums it up insightfully:

Classical and medieval philosophies tended to consign imagination to a merely transitional position between reason and perception. Its function was generally restricted to that of transmitting mimetic images of reality to the purifying citadel of reason . . . As an active creative power which presumed to create truth from within itself, imagination was outlawed by premodern philosophy.¹³

He goes on to compare this restrictive view of imagination with the new attitude characteristic of modern thought since the Renaissance: "What most distinguishes the modern philosophies of imagination from their various antecedents is a marked affirmation of the creative power of man."¹⁴

But before we leave the medieval world let us take a quick look at the strongest condemnation, perhaps, of the creative imagination in the history of Western thought, that of Philoxenes of Mabboug, a leading fifth-century theologian of the Syriac Christian Church. He condemns the very use of the imagination as intrinsically perverse and potentially idolatrous. Richard Kearney sums up Philoxenes' position:

The imagination, he charges, is *intrinsically* perverse. It is not just the *content* of images that is evil; it is their very *nature*. It is not *what* man imagines that is bad but *that* he imagines at all. The perversity of imagination . . . resides in its very activity as *representation*—that is, the false claim to present spiritual truth immediately . . . the occlusion of reality behind an illusory imitation. This act of substitution is, moreover, *inherently* idolatrous, for it incarcerates the one who images in his own self-glorifying hallucination.¹⁵

The core of the perversity is the very haste in pretending to represent, in attractive sensory images, truths about nature and God, truths which can only be known by purified spiritual intelligence. Therefore Guy Lardreau, one of the experts on Philoxenes, concludes, "Thus the whole of spiritual life can be defined as a struggle against images, and its progress as a gradual access to the things themselves."¹⁶ The foundations are laid here for *iconoclasm* and the *negative theology*.

The Renaissance

The importance of the Renaissance for our purposes is that it inaugurates a shift of consciousness toward the central role of *creativity as an essential property* of human nature and as a mark of its status as participated image of God, the supreme Creator. Renaissance writers, exulting in the explosion of literary and artistic creativity sparked by the rediscovery of the intellectual and artistic creativity of the classical Greco-Roman world, take delight in singing the praises of the human being in its dignity as microcosm of the universe and creator of new beauty, in finite imitation of God, Creator of the whole universe out of nothing by the sheer power of its creative intelligence. This brought with it a new attitude toward history, one that looked more *toward the future* than the *past*, though it was still inspired by the creative periods of the past. The famous oration of Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, and his less known piece *On the Imagination*, bear clear witness to this new, optimistic attitude toward human creativity, one that thought of creativity as working through the imagination and looking toward an even more glorious future of humanity.¹⁷ What strikes me as most seminal in this new attitude are three things: (1) creativity is seen as an essential component of human dignity; (2) this conception of creativity is rooted in the conception of the human being as image, participating through our finite creative imagination in the infinite creativity of God; and (3) the hint that the ultimate source of creativity does not originate from below, from the world of sense, but from above, from the very nature of intelligence itself, since God is pure spirit.

Some Renaissance thinkers, like Giordano Bruno and to some extent Marcilius Ficino, expanded this new emphasis on the creativity of the human imagination along mystical and gnostic lines that were dubiously orthodox at best. Thus, as Richard Kearney reports:

Bruno hailed the human imagination as the creative source of the forms of thought . . . and championed the idea of a *spiritus phantasticus* which enables mortals to transcend their finite condition and become one with the secret rhythms of the cosmos. The material world . . . is there to be transformed by man's own imaginative power (*vis imaginativa*) in accordance with a hidden cosmic design.¹⁸

With Marsilio Ficino, Giordano Bruno also believed that the imagination was the privileged vehicle of communication of the Holy Spirit with humans. These currents went underground, however, to surface again in the German idealism of Fichte and Schelling.

Descartes and the Rationalists

Despite the great theoretical creativity of the new mathematically based science, the seventeenth century marks one of the temporary eclipses of appreciation of the creative imagination in its role as producing fully concrete sensuous images at the service of intelligence. For Descartes, since he split the human being into two radically different entities—pure immaterial mind, on the one hand, and pure matter in motion, on the other—the only link between the mind of man and the world of matter is the mathematical structure residing in both (and also in the mind of God, who created the world mathematically). Hence, although he admits the imagination as the *interface between mind and body*, the only reliable connection between the two is through *mathematical images* (such as geometrical figures). The remarkable thing about such images, he says, is that they are the only images in the human imagination that are clear and distinct in their intelligible content; all other images remain bound to the errors of corporeal contingency, “an unreliable copy rather than an original creation in its own right . . . In short, while Descartes was incontestably ‘modern’ in his evaluation of the *cogito*, he was essentially ‘pre-modern’ in his negative assessment of imagination . . . Whence Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famous quip: ‘The philosophy of Descartes has cut the throat of poetry.’”¹⁹ As Benedetto Croce later sums it up in his *Aesthetic*: “The mathematical spirit fostered by Descartes forbade all possibility of a serious consideration of poetry and art.”²⁰ Descartes even claimed that the human mind could exist on its own without the imagination, insisting that it “is in no way a necessary element in my nature, or in my essence.”²¹

Other leading rationalists, such as Leibniz and Spinoza, shared this same hostility to the imagination. For Spinoza, “imaginary ideas” are always inferior to “ideas of reason” and “lead the mind away from eternal truth,” which is always of what must necessarily be, not just contingently possible; hence they are incompatible with true freedom, which can only be achieved when the mind has dispelled all “imaginative illusions.” Leibniz warns his friend Arnauld against the deceptive “ideas of imagination,” and since the *cogito* is the autonomous source of true judgments, there is no need to represent our truths through the mediation of images.²² The Cambridge idealist John Smith denounced the imagination as a “deforming lens”; Gravina called it a “witch,” and Muratori a “drunkard.”²³

The Empiricists: Locke and Hume

John Locke and David Hume both give a central role to the imagination; in Hume it practically replaces the mind itself. But they are both interested primarily in how all our knowledge arises from sense images, which the imagination joins together by laws of association to form what we call ideas. They show little interest in the creative imagination as such. In fact, there is an astonishing text in Locke in which he advises parents that if their children “have a poetic vein . . . parents should labour to have it stifled and suppressed as much as may be . . . for it is very seldom that anyone discovers mines of gold or silver in Parnassus. ’Tis a pleasant air but a barren soil.”²⁴ Hume mentions the creative imagination, it seems, only to disparage two types of people who use the creative imagination: metaphysicians, on the one hand, who imagine that illusory entities and misleading concoctions like substance, accidents, form, and the self, are real; and poets, on the other hand, whom he looks upon with mild contempt but tolerates as harmless “liars by profession.”²⁵

Kant: The Rediscovery of Creative Imagination

In his profoundly insightful and illuminating—though still controversial—interpretation of Kant’s theory of the transcendental imagination, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Martin Heidegger makes the claim that this theory “represents a watershed in Western philosophy.” Far from being the mere servant of reason, whose proper nature and role, as grounded in the senses, is to be guided and illuminated by the latter—as the ancients and medievals, and even the early rationalists, viewed it—it turns out that the imagination is actually a *transcendental* (a priori), *radically spontaneous*, and *creative faculty* that underlies and renders possible the very activity of reason itself, “without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever.” In a word, it becomes “the groundless ground” of all human knowing. This opens the door to a whole new horizon in Western philosophy of thinking about the creative imagination as one of the foundational pillars of human knowing, at least an equal collaborator with reason but perhaps even the senior partner in the human enterprise of knowing.

How does Kant come to this position? He is forced into it step by step by the exigencies of the Copernican Revolution in the explanation of human knowledge, whereby the world no longer informs the receptive

human mind to know it as it is, but rather the mind itself actively imposes its own a priori forms of sense and understanding on the outside world to render it intelligible—for humans. This produces a split between two levels of the human knowing apparatus: on the bottom is the input of the senses from the outside world, yielding only a not-yet-intelligible manifold of unordered sense data; on the top is the set of great general a priori forms of rational understanding, poised to impose intelligible order on the unformed sense manifold pouring in on it from the body. But the problem was how to get the two together so that these very general empty forms could be fitted together with the appropriate particular sense data now offering themselves to be rendered intelligible. Not just any forms would fit any data simultaneously. And Kant had firmly rejected the one great umbilical cord that had connected the Aristotelian and Thomistic mind with the world of sense and the outside world: the power of the mind to have *abstractive insight* into the intelligible forms already imminent in the sense images, impressed upon them by the actions of material things themselves. Some other way had to be found to fit the universal forms to the particular data present; otherwise no precise knowledge of the empirical world would be possible at all, and the Newtonian science he was so proud of would collapse too.

The mediating power would have to come from within the a priori structure of knowing by some power connected at one end with the intellectual order and at the other with the sensible. To do the job Kant postulates a distinct new faculty described as the *transcendental imagination*, a spontaneous, actively creative power of forming new progressively schematized images that brings the intellectual forms and the sense data closer and closer together, so that the appropriate universal forms of the understanding can finally subsume the given data under them and render them intelligible, with a good fit.

But this remarkable creative power conferred on the imagination must initiate its activity, Kant insists, in an *entirely a priori way*, independent of any already given sense object. The first thing this creative power produces is the a priori forms of any possible sensible experience, that is, the pure forms of *time* and *space* (corresponding to the absolute time and Euclidean space of Newton's physics). Any intellectual understanding of the empirical world must now show up only within these finite limits of the human knower, *time* and *space*. Kant here prefigures the crucial next step taken by Heidegger—who credits Kant gratefully for the inspiration of his own move—namely, that *being* itself can only be known in objective

human understanding under the form of time, as temporalized. Kant himself does not take this step explicitly, but he could have and should have, Heidegger claims. Thus the very capacity of the intellect itself to compare, differentiate, and order its sense manifold, in a word, to synthesize and subsume the sense data under its a priori forms of understanding, depends on the preparatory activity of the transcendental imagination, as Kant admits in a remarkable text: "Synthesis in general is the result merely of the power of the imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no knowledge whatsoever, but of the existence of which we are hardly ever conscious." But just how this power works within us, Kant tells us in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, "is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose actual modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze."²⁶

We now have the surprising result that this amazing power of the "productive imagination," far from being merely the humble servant of reason under the latter's control, has now become the very *foundation* of the entire activity of human knowing, the ultimate hidden link between sense and reason, the "groundless ground" of reason itself—without which the latter remains helpless to carry on its own activity of subsuming experience under its rational illumination—an ultimate "originating power" (Kant calls it *originarius*) which does not derive from any other power. This is a truly new position in Western philosophical thought.

Kant lays out the steps by which he is led to this remarkable conclusion in the first edition (A) of his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. But in the second edition (B) of the same work in 1787 he quietly drops out most of the analysis leading to these revolutionary conclusions, leaving us only the bare skeleton of the need for a mediating schematizing function of the transcendental imagination between the universal a priori forms of the understanding and the formless input of sense.²⁷ Heidegger speculates—very plausibly, it seems to me—that when he realized where all this was leading him, toward overturning the whole rational tradition of the pre-eminence and grounding relation of reason over imagination, he lost his nerve, pulled back at the edge of the abyss, as Heidegger puts it, and closed off this open door threatening the supremacy of reason that he was committed to as an Enlightenment man.

Before leaving Kant, we cannot resist quoting what seems to me one of his most insightful remarks about the relation of the products of creative imagination to those of reason, contained in his later *Critique of Judgment*.

Explaining what he means by an “aesthetic idea”—a perfect example, to my mind, of the fusion of idea and image in a work of art—he describes how artistic genius is capable by the forms it creates of carrying us beyond the limits of conceptuality altogether; he then defines an aesthetic idea as: “a representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any thought whatever, i.e., concept, being adequate to it.”²⁸ An insight we can all say “Yes” to!

German Idealism and the Romantic Movement

But the cat was now out of the bag. The movement of German idealism inspired by Kant in spite of himself, brushed aside Kant’s hesitations and half-hearted holding on to realism, and launched on a veritable “cult of the creative imagination,” as it has been called. Fichte cuts entirely the embarrassing submission of creative human reason to an already given external world. The creative imagination is now taken up into the very heart of reason itself, and becomes the magician that *constructs* out of its own power and then represents to the transcendental Ego the *entire external world* as somehow opposed to, other than, the Ego itself. Hegel will finally break through this cunning self-deception with his ultimate synthesis of the Rational and the Real as in the end identical through our participation in the creative self-expression of Absolute Spirit in history. Fichte himself does not hesitate to hail the creative imagination as “the very possibility of our consciousness, our life and our being.” Reason thus becomes identified with the power of imagination to provide access to “the spiritual order of essential being,” an order where it operates as “pure activity, absolutely by itself alone, having no need of any instrument outside itself—absolute freedom.”²⁹ As Kearney says, whom I am quoting and deeply indebted to in the above analysis, “The humanist equation between imagination and freedom could hardly be more unequivocal.”³⁰

Schelling, the other great exponent of German idealism, goes even further. In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1799–1800), Schelling makes the exalted claim that “the productive and synthetic imagination is the organon and pinnacle of all philosophy,”³¹ “the creative power which reconciles the age-old oppositions of Western metaphysics—freedom and necessity, being and becoming, the universal and the particular, the eternal and the temporal, even the human and the divine.”³² Schelling does not hesitate to speak of the *divine* creative imagination. The divine creativity

is here described in terms so closely resembling its created image in the human knower that it will take only one step further to identify the two—as Feuerbach does. Poetry and philosophy now become equal twins in the expression of this God-like creativity in the human person, so that Schelling himself now writes philosophy itself often in a kind of visionary poetic language.

The poets and artists of the Romantic movement (Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, etc.) took up these texts of Schelling as a kind of philosophical manifesto for the luxuriant flowering of the Romantic imagination in poetry and the arts. The very distinction between nature and art now becomes blurred, since for Schelling nature is the unconscious production of the human creative imagination, whereas in art and philosophy the same creative activity becomes self-conscious. Thus for the Romantics the creative imagination now becomes an *autonomous creative power* grounded in nothing deeper or higher than itself, no longer under its former subjugation to the arid rule of logical rationality—in a word, “a defiant challenge to the Enlightenment insistence that imagination remain subservient to reason,” as Kearney puts it insightfully, since the creative imagination itself has now become identified with the highest and noblest functioning of reason, and has now become the supreme manifestation of the exalted status of the human as created image of the divine creative imagination itself.³³

This Romantic intoxication with the apparently limitless power of human creative imagination began to fade, however, as its embarrassing ineffectiveness to change the existential world of human living, with all its materials, greed, and lust for power, became more and more apparent.

Nietzsche ends the nineteenth century by pricking the bubble of the Romantic exaltation of the creative imagination; one could also say that he prolongs this same trend to declare the autonomy of imagination with respect to the rule of reason by finally cutting loose the creative imagination from all linkage with truth itself and making it rather the primary instrument and expression of the will to power. Kearney sums it up well:

Man’s imagination is confronted with the absurdity of his existential situation . . . The creative imagination is indeed foundationless, a free-floating nothingness, pure will and desire. But therein lies its virtue. Therein reposes the incontrovertible challenge of modern man to exist without alibi or reprieve, without any recourse to higher values . . . Only when the last lingering belief in a transcendent deity disappears can creative imagination come into its own. Then

at last man is free to invent the project of the super-man (*Ueberschensch*): the great individual who dares to make his arbitrary existence into a work of art. The productive imagination there assumes its existential vocation as a will to power in a meaningless world . . . seeing it as a challenge to create everything new out of nothing.³⁴

*The Twentieth Century: Exaltation and Deconstruction
of the Humanistic Creative Imagination*

Our twentieth century, especially the last half of it, has shown a kind of schizophrenic alternation between exalting again the role of the creative imagination and launching a concerted attack by postmodernism and deconstruction to undermine and dissolve the whole notion of the *autonomous Enlightenment self*, its overconfident *logocentrism* of scientific reason, and, together with the imagining self, the very intelligibility and even existence of the humanistic *creative imagination*.

Husserl, in his creation of the new philosophical discipline of phenomenology, despite his love of logic and mathematics and the declared rigor of his methodology, gives an absolutely central role to the creative imagination as the primary instrument for carrying out a successful phenomenological analysis: by the *free systematic variation* of diverse perspectives on an object under analysis, carried out by the *creative imagination*, one can arrive finally at an intuition of the object's invariant essence, insofar as it appears within human consciousness. The creative imagination is here an indispensable collaborator and instrument of reason itself.

Heidegger, inspired by Kant's revolutionary uncovering of the foundational role of the transcendental imagination in all human understanding, forges ahead where Kant hesitates and pulls back. But he uses this creative power to undermine the primacy of reason itself and deconstruct the claim of classical metaphysics to understand *being itself as presence*, pure presence as such transcending time and space, rooted in the pure being of God as eternal timeless presence. The a priori intervention of the imagination to lay down the unbreachable boundaries of time and space, outside of which no human understanding can operate, reveals this pretension to be an illusion. *Being itself and time* must now be thought—by us, let us remember—as one. So begins his deconstruction of Western metaphysics as focused on *being as presence*, which all later deconstructionists will press home.

Sartre initiates the whole deconstructive turn against the value of the creative imagination, or the *world of the imaginary*, as he calls it. When we imagine creatively we are aware, if we are sane, that this is not the real world; so when we are positing these made-up images before our consciousness, we are really positing a not-real, that is, a *nothing*, and so for the moment negating the real world. And yet we cannot do without creating this imaginary world, in order to escape from the constraints and disappointments of the ordinary real world, step back from it to judge it, etc.

Hence the creative imagination that negates the real world to let us live in an unreal world of our making, although we can't do without it, is still a sign of a deep *inborn pathology in the human*. Why? Since every attempt to negate reality is in some sense a symptom of pathological self-deception, the ineradicable presence in the human being of this power of creating the unreal must be recognized as an *existential infirmity*. Hence, as Kearney insightfully sums it up: "Sartre has no option but to conclude that all humans are pathological by nature—crippled by their own nothingness. Imagination emerges in the last analysis as an illness which esthetic man, everyman, cannot afford to do without."³⁵ Nothingness shows up again as a dark abyss not only surrounding us but already hidden deep in the being of humans. One more indication for Sartre of the absurdity infecting the very being of the human as it emerges into self-consciousness!

Gaston Bachelard, coming after Sartre, represents a strong swing of the pendulum back towards a neoromantic exaltation of the imagination and opposition of it to the pedestrian world of reason. Far from being a pathology of the human as for Sartre, the creative imagination is the great "humanizing faculty," the supreme expression of freedom in the human subject. Far from plunging us into the nothingness of the unreal, it is the creative agent by which we escape the limitations of the past and present and, by gazing with "half-opened eyes" into the vast world of the possible, renew and enhance the actual world by making some new possible become real within it. As Bachelard puts it: "The imagination is not a faculty which fabricates images of reality; it is a power which forms images to surpass reality in order to change reality. It is the power of a sur-humanity."³⁶ In fact man himself is now redefined: "Man is a *being to be imagined*."³⁷ This is put forward as a new humanism, but a "subversive one," because it decenters the subject and opens it to a new beyond-the-self. It also declares the creative imagination's independence of the rule of reason.

We have no space here to go into the numerous other more balanced and moderate phenomenologists of the imagination such as Merleau-Ponty or Ricoeur with their rich and complex hermeneutics of the

language of the imagination, nor into the attempt of many analytic philosophers to evaporate it away by interpreting creative images as implicit propositions or pretending. Propositions, it seems to me, are just what creative images are not, though one can abstract propositions from them.

Let us now turn to the last chapter in our historical soundings, the postmodern, deconstructionist dissolving of both the creative imagination and its images into a play of “parody” where images, devoid of any origination by individual subjects, turn into a hall of mirrors reflecting only each other, in an endless play of parody or illusion, without reference to the real. Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Jean-François Lyotard, Roland Barthes the novelist, and finally Jacques Derrida all contribute their particular angle to the general movement. First the clear reference of human language and concepts to the real is destabilized, then dissolved into an endless deferral of meaning into references to other words in a hall of mirrors with no closure. Then the autonomous self, the supposed originating author of creative images, is dissolved in its turn into a pastiche or collage of elements coming from many sources outside itself. Since the originating author of the images has now been dissolved, postmoderns prefer to speak no longer of “the imagination,” but of “the imaginary.” The authorless images themselves are now revealed as only endless mimicry and reflections of each other, ending up finally as an endless play of parody like a hall of reflecting mirrors closed in on itself, with no stable reference any more to a world of the real clearly distinguishable from the imaginary, thus reflecting the endless intertextuality of language itself.³⁸

All this reflects the concerted effort all across the spectrum of these thinkers to undermine and dissolve not only the *autonomous rational self* of the Enlightenment—and together with it the whole arrogant “logocentrism of the West”—but also the god-like *creatively imagining self* of the Romantic ideal. Michel Foucault went so far as to predict somberly the “end of man”:

Man is not the oldest nor the most usual problem which faces human thought . . . Man is an invention. The archeology of our thought can easily show that it was invented rather recently and that it may disappear very soon . . . like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.³⁹

Fortunately, this movement seems to be losing steam everywhere, especially in Europe, and shrinking more and more to an in-house dialectic among an academic elite, with the wider educated public resisting this extreme dismantling of both the human person as responsible center of

action and the authentic originality of the creative imagination rooted within it. The movement is still, however, making strong waves in the academic world of the United States, especially in literature and philosophy departments.

Conclusion

What can we conclude from reflecting on this conflicted history with its frequent swings of the pendulum in opposite directions? The key, perpetually recurring issue seems to be not so much the *existence* of something like the creative imagination as a distinguishing mark of human beings—aside from the latest extremes of the postmodernist denial—but its relation to the *guidance and rule of reason*, and what that relation tells us about the nature and dignity of the human person as embodied spirit and image of God. I propose these as the best-evidenced conclusions:

1. The creative imagination in the human person is one of the most distinctive expressions of the intrinsic unity within duality of soul and body, intellect and sense, both in their ontological root and their joint activity, proper to the human person as embodied spirit. It is the *incarnation of idea in matter*, whose result is something unique as a mode of being, irreducible to either one by itself, or even juxtaposed in sequence. The wisdom story exhibits this luminously.

2. The role of the creative imagination is not just to understand and appreciate better the actual world already given us—the predominant perspective of both the ancient and medieval worlds, it seems, and this is certainly true as far as it goes—but also to be *more radically creative* in expanding and enriching the present world in new ways never seen before, in the arts and literature, in technological, economic, political, and cultural (including spiritual) invention, as the Renaissance humanists saw and celebrated, and has been lived out ever since by humanity.

3. The only truly wise, enduringly fruitful, and authentically natural way of exercising this God-given power is under the *guidance and illumination*, the larger intentional finality, of *human reason* itself, at the service of reason in the widest sense, hence neither opposed to the rule of reason nor totally autonomous with respect to it. The creative imagination, in a word, makes an *invaluable servant* and collaborator, but a *poor master*. Yet at the same time, while commissioned by reason, it must be allowed to

execute its mission in its own mysterious way, beyond the capacity of reason itself to fathom, precisely because the animating human soul is here working below the level of self-conscious reason, in the creative “in-between” betwixt intellect and sense, mind and body, probably also in the even more mysterious in-between of the human spirit in touch in some hidden way with a higher spiritual world, even with the divine Spirit itself, the supreme fullness of original creativity.

4. This power of the creative imagination is one of our most distinctive ways as embodied spirits—proper neither to the angels above us or the animals below us—of manifesting the *image in us of God* as supreme, free, and unpredictable Creator of all other things totally out of nothing. I suspect also that, since the originating creativity of God is rooted in the divine power as pure Spirit, the deepest roots of our own creativity really rest in the power of our *spiritual intelligence and will*, but that this power, as human, cannot express itself adequately without enlisting the help of the body. When we are creative, we are creative precisely as *embodied spirits*.

It should be noted that in thus presenting the creative imagination operating under the guidance of reason as a distinctive aspect of the image of God in human beings, we are going beyond the traditional position of Aquinas, Augustine, and others, who located the image of God exclusively in the spiritual intellect and will as able to know and love God. Following the inspiration of the Renaissance thinkers and artists, we are expanding the notion of image of God to include our own limited—but still unsoundably rich—power of creativity, exercised through our imagination, in analogous imitation of the divine creativity itself.

The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism

My aim in this chapter is to lay out the main steps in what I consider the most creative and fruitful development in Thomism today. It is the carrying out of the central philosophical project of Karol Wojtyła, the late Pope John Paul II: namely, the integration of personalism and metaphysics in twentieth-century Thomism. Our aim in what follows is to reconstruct the various steps in the carrying out of this project.

Karol Wojtyła and the Lublin School of Thomism in Poland

The fundamental insight of the Lublin School was the need to complete and enrich the irreplaceable foundational treasure of traditional Thomistic existential metaphysics with the rich, new contribution of twentieth-century phenomenology, in particular the interpersonal phenomenology of twentieth-century Christian personalism, such as that of Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Marcel, Max Scheler, and Martin Buber.

The first step was for John Paul II to make the courageous move of showing how Thomistic metaphysics by itself is not adequate to give a full philosophical explanation of the human person. There was something it could not do that could only be done by a distinct phenomenological method. This was what he called the unique subjective *interiority* of human personal experience, as distinct from the objective common structures of metaphysical analysis: for example, the actual inner process of coming by self-determination to a moral decision (with its implications), the lived experience of friendship, of married love, etc. He does this in his highly

significant but too little known article translated from the Polish, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being.”¹ This opens up a whole new realm of exploration of the interior life of the person beyond the reach of the traditional method of Thomistic metaphysics, whose aim is to uncover the objective common structures underlying all reality. Many conservative Thomists were not happy with this exposing of the limitations of the great Saint Thomas, but John Paul II was right on target.

On the other hand, he is careful to point out that phenomenology alone is incapable of giving a full explanation of the human person. Phenomenology by definition can describe only what actually appears, shows itself to my consciousness now, in the present. Hence it cannot reveal to us the *final end, goal, and ultimate purpose* of human life, because this still lies in the future, and can only be argued to by metaphysical analysis. Both approaches are needed. This is an important new insight not contained explicitly either in the metaphysical or the phenomenological traditions alone.

Personalization of Thomistic Metaphysics Itself

This is a creative step being taken by a number of contemporary Thomists (for example, Kenneth Schmitz, myself, and others), beyond what John Paul II himself had done. He had proposed only complementing the traditional Thomistic metaphysics with the distinct new phenomenology of Christian Personalism, but leaving the traditional Thomistic metaphysics itself untouched. We are carrying his project of integration further by showing how a personalist dimension is actually implicit within the very structure and meaning of being itself in a fully developed Thomistic metaphysics—a key step in our overall project of a “creative retrieval of Saint Thomas.” The key steps in the unveiling of this implicit personalist dimension are as follows:

1. Aim of metaphysics: to discover what it means to belong to the community of real existents, most basic of all communities.
2. To make this discovery, the primary qualification for any member is to actively present itself to this community by its characteristic actions. If a real being were to have no action at all, it could not be known by anything else (save its Creator, though it could make no response to the latter); and it would *make no difference* at all in the real universe. Hence it

might just as well not be at all. It could not be a member of the community of real existents, which therefore must be a community of interacting members—or else simply be lost in the darkness of noncommunication.

To be a real being, therefore, is *to be an actor*. Its role is to act out its authentic being and destiny on the vast stage of real existents. For human persons, of course, this means to act it out freely, which means they can also try to act out an inauthentic self.

Furthermore, Christians can act out their authentic selves on *two levels*: the level of their natural potentialities and the supernatural level—that is, *act out Christ* in their own lives. “Follow me. Be my disciple,” Jesus invites us.² This point is especially meaningful for those training to be priests: in the Consecration of the Mass they actually take on the words of Jesus as their own.

3. For Saint Thomas every real being is by nature active, tending to pour over into self-manifesting, self-communicative action:

It is the nature of every actuality to communicate itself as far as it is possible.³

Communication follows upon the very meaning [*ratio*] of actuality.⁴

From the very fact that something exists in act, it is active.⁵

And since every action on others produces cause-effect relations all around it, it follows that every real being is somehow related to others (with appropriate qualifications for God’s side of the relation). Hence *to be real is to be related*. But, it may be objected, relations among created substances are only accidents, very secondary in importance to substances. The relations to this or that particular substance are indeed accidental. But the property of being related to others in the community of real existents is a necessary property following necessarily from the intrinsic natural dynamism of every real being to actively communicate itself to others. Although Aquinas does not make this conclusion explicit, it is necessarily implied. This is what justifies Pope Benedict XVI’s earlier critique of Saint Thomas as not recognizing that “relationality and substantiality are equally valid primordial modes of the real.”⁶

4. If every real being, therefore, has an active, giving side, the order of being itself, to be complete, must also have a receiving side: there cannot be a giving without a complementary receiving. The whole order of real being, therefore, must by nature be *dyadic*, a giving-receiving whole. The fullness of real being, once the community is there, cannot be a solitary

self-sufficient individual, but must be a giving-receiving community. Now the person, for Saint Thomas, is “that which is highest in all of nature.”⁷ But we know from our knowledge of personalism that the highest mode of personal existence is not solitary self-sufficiency but “persons in communion,” loving communion. It then follows that the highest mode of authentic *real being itself* is not solitary self-sufficiency but *persons-in-communion*.

Emergence of the Central Role of Receiving—Receptivity

Special notice should be given here to one important result emerging from the above insight into the dyadic conception of the community of real beings as a giving-receiving whole: namely, the new, at least explicitly new, recognition of the essential complementary value of the dimension of *receiving* alongside that of *giving* in this inseparable couplet. Especially in the higher realms of interpersonal relations, we have learned from personalist phenomenology that, important as the giving side is, if it dominates to the exclusion or diminution of the other side of receiving, the relation is one-sided, incomplete, not authentically fulfilling. Human friendship and love are only fulfilling when the active giving is not just received passively, but is freely, gratefully, actively welcomed, and this welcoming reception is positively communicated back to the giver and gratefully received in turn by the giver. Only thus is the giving itself fully complete and fulfilling for both parties. Paradoxical—yes! But also uniquely life-fulfilling! My inspiration for this central insight in interpersonal phenomenology did not come, I must confess, from Saint Thomas himself in any explicit way, but from Hans Urs von Balthasar, in a remarkably rich and insightful analysis. Here is this key text:

Receiving and letting be are as essential to the concept of absolute love as giving, which without the receptive letting be—and everything else that belongs to love: the grateful owing of oneself and the turning back of oneself to the giver—would have no capacity to give at all.⁸

This is one of the great secrets of mature interpersonal love that must be learned: both parties must be reciprocally givers and receivers to each other. Women, because of their natural priority as receivers in their lives, understand this immediately. Men find it harder to learn, and some never

seem to get it. This is not an act-potency relation, the principal one highlighted in traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics. Receptivity is now seen as in itself a positive ontological perfection; hence the relation is better understood as one of equality—some Thomists have called it more like an “act-act” one—in any case a unique one not explicitly taken care of in traditional Thomistic metaphysics.⁹

The final result is the *personalization of being itself* from within Thomistic metaphysics. The same classical terms for the fullness of being still remain—“pure act” equals the fullness of being and so forth—but the fullness of being now means “persons-in-communion.” This is a dramatic example of the guiding spirit behind the recent development of Thomistic personalism and my own life-long philosophical project: the creative retrieval of Saint Thomas.

All the key steps above seem to me reasonably implied by Saint Thomas’s own expressed positions, but he never got around to an explicit development of them himself. After all, he died at forty-nine, and these personalist questions were not the urgent controversial problems of his own day.

Application to God

This works beautifully. God does indeed belong to the community of real existents, but in a preeminent way. Not only does he make himself actively known to the community of real existents by actively revealing himself, communicating his goodness in finite participations to all its members, but he actually brings the entire community into existence as a whole with all their own dynamic, self-communicating acts of existence. He is the very founder of the whole community itself.

However, when it comes to whether and how the full notion of being as both giver-receiver personal being, developed above, can be affirmed of God, it seems that philosophical reason alone cannot quite establish this decisively. How could God be Persons-in-communion on his own level? We feel this should somehow be the case, but we can’t see that far into the Mystery to make a cogent argument for its actually being the case. That is where Christian revelation comes in to make a marvelous completion of Christian philosophical reason. It sheds a whole new light on the inner life of God himself, revealing that in fact the inner life of the Supreme Being is one of self-communicating love, of a community of three Persons in

the most intimate communion, who are precisely in the relation of giver-receiver. Jesus himself tells us: “All that I have, I have received from my Father,” and “All that my Father has, he has given me.”¹⁰ Yet the Second Person, the Son, the Receiver, is of absolutely equal perfection, value, dignity as the Father, the Giver—or you are a heretic! The same with the Holy Spirit.

This self-revelation on God’s own part confirms from above that our philosophical personalization of metaphysics is precisely on the right track. This is the very nature of Being itself at its highest level, to be Persons-in-communion, although philosophy cannot take us all the way to this secure affirmation on its own. The mystery unveiled by revelation makes the last step for our limited rational resources.

Thus the original project of John Paul II—the integration of personalism and Thomistic metaphysics—has been carried further than his own original vision, which was to complement the metaphysical approach of Saint Thomas with the distinct method of personalist phenomenology. It has been creatively extended further so as to uncover the personalist dimension lying implicit within the fuller understanding of the very meaning and structure of the metaphysics of being itself, not hitherto explicit in either the metaphysical or personalist traditions themselves. Such a uniquely contemporary synthesis can indeed, I propose, present Thomism as—rather than “out-of-date,” as so many contemporary thinkers try to brand it—a significantly “up to date” interlocutor on the contemporary philosophical scene.

NOTES

1. TWENTY-FOURTH AWARD OF THE AQUINAS MEDAL, BY THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION, TO W. NORRIS CLARKE, SJ

1. W. Norris Clarke, SJ, *The Philosophical Approach to God: A New Thomistic Perspective* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 1.

2. Ibid.

3. W. Norris Clarke, SJ, "Are Neo-Thomisms Viable?" in *Presença Filosófica* (São Paulo: Sociedade Brasileira de Filósofos Católicos, 1974), 185.

4. Maurice Blondel, *L'Action: Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1893).

5. Joseph Maréchal, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique: Leçons sur le développement historique et théorique du problème de la connaissance*, 5 vols. (Louvain: Éditions du Museum Lessianum, 1926–).

6. George Burr Leonard, *The Silent Pulse: A Search For The Perfect Rhythm That Exists in Each of Us* (New York: Dutton, 1978).

2. INTERPERSONAL DIALOGUE: KEY TO REALISM

1. My first insight into the role of language and dialogue in providing especially powerful evidence for realism came from the exploitation of this theme by August Brunner, SJ, one of the pioneers among Catholic thinkers in the personalist movement in Germany, and also one of my professors during my first philosophical studies in France. See his *La connaissance humaine* (Paris: Aubier, 1943), *La personne incarnée* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1947), and *Die Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ein systematischer Aufbau* (Freiburg: Herder, 1933), later published as *Fundamental Questions of Philosophy*, trans. Sidney A. Raemers (St. Louis: Herder, 1937). My views on the subject developed through contact with other personalist thinkers, such as Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Mounier, etc. When my own reflections are added, I can now no longer distinguish these later influences from my own unfolding of the initial clue, for which I gladly pay tribute to Father Brunner.

2. Let me indicate here, without development, the basic general thesis of my whole epistemology: *all* knowledge of the real is an interpretation of action, either of myself as acting or of myself as being acted on, plus the implications thereof.

3. CAUSALITY AND TIME

1. Mario Augusto Bunge, *Causality: The Place of the Causal Principle in Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 3. With regard to our present problem, Bunge criticizes the temporal sequence theory of cause and effect as being neither necessary nor sufficient by itself for causality. But he fails to grasp the essential metaphysical issue when he maintains that cause and effect can be either simultaneous or temporally successive. On the confusion in contemporary causal theory see also the preface by Henry Margenau to Ernst Cassirer's *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics: Historical and Systematic Studies of the Problem of Causality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956): "As to the meaning of causality, or the principle of causality, current literature is so rich in divergent interpretations that a mere catalogue of meanings would require a volume" (xii).

2. The specification of cause as actually causing the causal action (as the traditional Scholastic adage puts it, *actio est in passio*), cause *as* cause is important. It is obvious that the cause simply as a being, the source from which causal action flows, will usually exist before its effect.

3. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Open Court, 1929), 99. Basically the same analysis is given by positivists: M. Schlick, "Causality in Everyday Life and in Recent Science," in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1949), 516; H. Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956): "Explanation in terms of causes means pointing out a previous event that is connected with the later event in terms of general laws" (207).

4. Bertrand Russell, "On the Notion of Cause," in *Mysticism and Logic, and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 1953), 174. He is elaborating the primary definitions given in James Mark Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), such as: "Causality . . . the necessary connection of events in the time-series" (1:163), etc.

5. Adolf Grünbaum, "Relativity, Causality, and Weiss's Theory of Relations," *Review of Metaphysics* 7 (1953–54): 117. Note the philosophical interpretation given to the Einstein theory by confronting it directly with the Aristotelian metaphysical doctrine.

6. Milič Čapek, "Relativity and the Status of Space," *Review of Metaphysics* 9 (1955–56), 188. See also his clear-cut statement, "Toward a Widening of the Notion of Causality," *Diogenes*, no. 28 (1959): 63–90.

7. Nicolai Hartmann, *Philosophie der Natur: Abriss der speziellen kategorienlehre* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1950), 319; see also 361–63: "Zeitlichkeit und Prozess als kategoriale Bedingungen der Kausalität," where he insists that temporality is a necessary condition of causality even in the realm of spirit.

8. Paul Weiss, *Modes of Being* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), 40, 42. See also *Nature and Man* (New York: H. Holt, 1947), 4.

9. Bunge, *Causality*: “The philosophic notion of causality that has come to be accepted among scientists in the last hundred years actually entails the idea of a time lag of the effect relative to the cause” (63). See also Victor Fritz Lenzen, *Causality in Natural Science* (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1954).

10. This has already been done by Paul Weiss in elegant and telling fashion in *Nature and Man*, 4–5; see also John Wild, “A Realistic Defense of Causal Efficacy,” *Review of Metaphysics* 2 (1948–49): 1–14. One of the main aims of Bunge’s work on causality, mentioned above, is to restore even in science the notion of causality as an ontological category signifying productivity.

11. John Hospers, *Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953): “However a timeless God (or any timeless entity) might be related to the temporal universe, the relation could hardly be a *causal* one, for the causal relation is a relation among temporal events” (331).

12. Parts of this history can be found briefly sketched in various scattered sources, such as J. S. Wilkie, “The Problem of the Temporal Relation of Cause and Effect,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 1 (1950): 211–29. (This article agrees with us, by the way, in defending simultaneity of cause and effect, but attempts to do so on the basis of purely empirical and rather casually analyzed evidence.) See Bunge, *Causality*, 62–74; Johannes Eric Heyde, *Entwertung der Kausalität!? Für und wider den Positivismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1957), a penetrating philosophico-scientific critique of the empiricist devaluation of ontological causal efficacy.

13. *Posterior Analytics*, 2, chap. 12 entire. Aristotle does, however, seem to envisage here, without further analysis, the possibility of some types of causal sequence involving time. See Melbourne G. Evans, “Causality and Explanation in the Logic of Aristotle,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 19 (1959): 466–85.

14. *Physics*, 2, chap. 3, 195b17–20; 3, chap. 3 entire. For more on Aristotle, see: Theodore de Règnon, *La métaphysique des causes d’après Saint Thomas et Albert le Grand* (2nd ed.; Paris: Victor Retaux, 1906), 164–75; Francis Xavier Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St. Thomas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1940); Dominique Dubarle, OP, “La causalité dans la philosophie d’Aristote,” in *Histoire de la philosophie et métaphysique: Aristote, Saint Augustin, Saint Thomas, Hegel*, vol. 1 in the series “Recherches de philosophie,” (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1955), 9–55.

15. For Saint Thomas, see his commentaries on the passages of Aristotle quoted above, and Joseph de Finance, SJ, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas* (Paris: Beauchesne et des Fils, 1945); Meehan, *Efficient Causality*; J.-M. Henri-Rousseau, OP, “L’être et l’agir,” *Revue thomiste* 53 (1953): 488–531; *Revue thomiste* 54 (1954): 267–97; *Revue thomiste* 55 (1955): 85–118. Duns

Scotus gives perhaps the fullest and most explicit formulation of the classical doctrine: *Opus Oxoniense*, I, d. 28, q. 3, n. 10; II, d. 2, q. 10, n. 5; II, d. 5, q. 2, n. 6, in *Commentaria Oxoniensa ad IV Libros Magistri Sententiarum Novis Curis*, ed. Mariano Fernández García, 2 vols. (Quaracchi, Italy: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1912–1914); *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam Aristotelis*, V, q. 2; IX, q. 5, n. 5, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Luke Wadding (Lyon: Sumptibus Laurentii Durand, 1639), vol. 4.

16. See, for example, *Collectorium circa Quattuor Libros Sententiarum*, I, d. 1, q. 3, N-O (Tübingen, 1501): “Omne illud quo posito sequitur aliud debet esse causa illius. . . . Ex tali ordine semper convenit inferre causalitatem in priori respectu posterioris, maxime si prius potest esse sine posteriori, et non e converso naturaliter.” It would not be fair, however, to harden Ockham’s position on the necessity of temporal sequence. Elsewhere he speaks of cause simply as that which is required for the being of another (*ibid.*, N; *ibid.*, d. 45, D); it is a question, therefore, of a tendency, not of a fixed and exclusive position. On Ockham’s causal theory, see Erich Hochstetter, *Studien zur Metaphysik und Erkenntnislehre Wilhelms von Ockham* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1927), Kap. 5, “Das Kausalproblem.”

17. See Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 505–11 and the references there.

18. See Carlo Giacon, *La Causalità nel razionalismo moderno: Cartesio, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz* (Milan: F. Bocca, 1954).

19. See David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. I, pt. 3, sec. 2 ff., 14; *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 7, pt. 2.

20. Thus Schlick insists that events themselves fill up the world adequately, with no need or place for further “ontological glue” between them (522, see n. 3 above). John Stuart Mill, however, is indecisive and fuzzy on the strict necessity of temporal succession (*A System of Logic*, People’s ed. [London, 1886], bk. III, chap. 5, sec. 7, 247).

21. Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed., Second Analogy of Experience, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), 218ff., 227, 469; see the long commentary of H. J. Paton, *Kant’s Metaphysic of Experience: A Commentary on the First Half of the Kritik der reinen vernunft* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1936), II, chap. 44–45.

22. *Critique of Pure Reason*, 262, 469. On the latter page he makes it precise that the causal action itself precedes temporally its effect: “Since the causality of this cause, that is, the *action* of the cause, is antecedent in time to the effect which has *ensued* upon it.” (italics in original)

23. For the literal expression of these principles see the text of Čapek cited in n. 6 above or Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), chap. 12, sec. 4.

24. The dispute among physicists as to whether the indeterminism principle of quantum physics does away with “causality” (that is, predictability) is

still by no means settled, since new, more-deterministic models expressing the same experimental data have recently been proposed by Bohm and others. See Bunge, *Causality*, 307–32, and the whole of Cassirer, *Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Physics*.

25. Hindu thought has stressed powerfully the mutual immanence of cause in effect and vice versa at the moment of causal action, to the point of almost identifying the two. See Gioacchino Patti, *Der Samavāya im Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika-System: ein Beitrag zur Erkenntnis der indischen Metaphysik und Erlösungslehre* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1955). The same notion is at the root of Saint Thomas's doctrine of the immediate presence of God in all things by His creative causality (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 8, a. 1). Presence through causality is obviously impossible unless cause and effect are simultaneous. It is noteworthy that in all the great metaphysical systems of both East and West the dynamic connection *between* beings drops off into mystery at some point.

26. See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum*, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris: Sumptibus P. Lethielleus, 1929), I, d. 26, q. 2, a. 1; *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, q. 7, a. 11.

27. See Robert O. Johann, SJ, "Subjectivity," *Review of Metaphysics* 12 (1958–59): 200–234; and Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), chap. 6, "Knowledge and Existence."

28. The application to causality has been well brought out by Arthur A. Vogel, "Efficient Causation and the Categories," *Modern Schoolman* 32 (1954–55): 243–56.

29. Étienne Gilson, *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (New York: C. Scribner and Son, 1936), 95.

30. I am aware that I am differing here from the position of Wilkie in his article, "The Problem of the Temporal Relation of Cause and Effect" (cited in note 12 above), who advocates the use of the contemporaneous theory of cause and effect even in science: "A theory of causes . . . which considers them as contemporaneous with their immediate effects is perfectly compatible with common sense, removes some of the troublesome paradoxes to which the theory of antecedent causation gives rise, and lends itself more readily than the latter theory to refinement for the purposes of exact science" (229). Though his analysis seems to me sound for the few cases examined, "causality" for him no longer carries its special scientific meaning of *predictability* but a more ontological sense. But possibly we should be less rigid and allow place in science for both successive and contemporaneous causal schemas in different contexts, as Bunge suggests (*Causality*).

4. SYSTEM: A NEW CATEGORY OF BEING?

Those who are in contact with current developments in Catholic thought (not to mention non-Catholic trends) will recognize that much of what I have

said is a reflection of an explicit and growing recognition among many Catholic thinkers, both in theology and philosophy, of the central importance and dignity—one might even say, equality of rank—of relation (with its corollary, order and system) as compared with substance. This has long been present in the Augustinian tradition, which described being itself as a relation to God. The difficulty here, however, was that they tended to reduce being or existence to “nothing but” a relation, partly because they could not fit it under any other of the Aristotelian categories, and thus left too much in the shadow the substantial “inseity” of creatures as real substances with a consistency and subsistence of their own.

Modern Christian personalism, inspired by Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Nédoncelle, and others, also stresses heavily relation to other persons as a constitutive note of personal substance as personal: “There is no I except in relation to a Thou,” etc. Those engaged in philosophy of nature who have a strong foundation in modern science tend in the same direction: for example, the position held in Louvain and by various German Scholastics that the whole material world below human beings may well constitute a single “substance.” See also the careful and thought-provoking analysis of form as the structure of a system in material beings, done by Allan B. Wolter, OFM, “Chemical Substance,” in *Philosophy of Science: The Philosophy of Science Institute Lectures*, St. John’s University Studies, Philosophical Series 1 (New York: St. John’s University Press, 1960), 87–130.

The most clear-cut general statement by a Thomist, to which I am obviously and deeply indebted, is that of Walter Brugger, SJ, “Das Mitsein: Eine Erweiterung der scholastischen Kategorienlehre,” *Scholastik* 31 (1956): 370–83; summarized in “Togetherness: A New Dimension for Traditional Thought,” *Philosophy Today* 1 (1957): 22–26. The author, however, is principally concerned with the application to human society and does not develop the technical possibilities of expressing the doctrine. A study by Maria Ritz, *Le problème de l’être dans l’ontologie de Maurice Blondel*, Studia Friburgensia, New Series 21 (Freibourg, Switzerland: Éditions Universitaires, 1958), makes the point that for Blondel substance and relation must be understood as forming an indissoluble unit, always in dynamic symbiosis, constantly passing back and forth into each other in a kind of Hegelian dialectical movement in being itself. The perfect exemplar of all reality is, after all, the Trinity, where substance and relation are totally coimplicated without any priority of one over the other.

The Thomistic metaphysical composition of incomplete correlative principles can also quite well sustain, it seems to me, interpretation along this same line. The only difficulty is that historically for polemical reasons the explicit stress has been mostly on establishing and defending the real distinction of relation from foundation rather than on their mutual circuminsession; the

technical language itself certainly contributes not a little to this disproportionate emphasis and betrays a focus of concern and implicit value judgment of importance that no contemporary mind can fail to recognize immediately and that it is not easy to overcome if the traditional technical language continues to be repeated and insisted on as an adequate enough expression of the reality. I see no good reason why Thomism should continue to suffer, to put its worst foot forward, in the vastly different climate of contemporary thought, by “the fallacy of misplaced emphasis.”

Interesting material may also be found in a book I have not yet had time to examine, Franz Schmidt, *Ordnungslehre* (Munich: E. Reinhardt, 1956). A final testimony from a modern poet may be of interest: “Poetry, like life, states that the very self of a thing is its relations, its having-to-do with other things. Whatever is in the world, whatever person, has meaning because it or he has to do with the whole universe: immeasurable and crowded reality. The technique of poetry aims for the intensification of a thing through showing the likeness of what is in that thing to something else—to everything else, as different” (Eli Siegel, *Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana* [New York: Definition Press, 1957], xi).

5. A CURIOUS BLIND SPOT IN THE ANGLO-AMERICAN TRADITION OF ANTITHEISTIC ARGUMENT

1. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 6–7.

2. *Ibid.*, 6; see also *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor, 1951 [now published by Open Court of La Salle, IL]), 8. The passage from Mill is in the *Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 36.

3. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part 4, in *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*, ed. Edwin A. Burt (New York: Modern Library, 1939) 714–15.

4. John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 429.

5. *Ibid.*, 430–31.

6. John Herman Randall and Justus Buchler, *Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1942), 159–61.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Ronald W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London: Watts, 1958), 161.

9. *Ibid.*, 165–66. For another example, see Harold H. Titus, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, 4th ed. (New York: American Book, 1964), 435.

10. Elmer Sprague, *What Is Philosophy? A Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 58, 64, and especially 63.

11. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, bk. II, chap. 52, n. 5, in *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 154.

12. Hywel David Lewis, *Our Experience of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 41.

13. See my own articles, “Analytic Philosophy and Language about God,” in *Christian Philosophy and Religious Renewal*, ed. George F. McLean (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1966), 39–73; and “How the Philosopher Can Give Meaning to Language about God,” presented at a challenging symposium held at the State University of New York at Buffalo, October 5–6, 1967 and published as *The Idea of God: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Edward H. Madden, Rollo Handy, and Martin Farber (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1968), 1–27.

14. For the origin of the philosophical notion of cause, see H. Boeder, “Origine et préhistoire de la notion philosophique de l’AITION,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 40 (1956): 421–43.

15. Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, II, 7, in *Opera Omnia Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, ed. Friedrich Haase, vol. 19, pt. 1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1902, orig. pub. 1852), 128. For some other early figures who spoke of God as “making himself” see my article on “Aseity” in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 1:945–47.

16. Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, I, 1, 1: *On the Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna, Fathers of the Church series (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 3–4.

17. *Meditations*, Reply to First Objections, in *Philosophical Works*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 2:16–17.

18. *Ibid.*, 2:14. Note that the causal principle expressed here allows for a being’s not having an efficient cause, though it must then have a reason why it needs no such cause.

19. *Meditations*, Reply to Fourth Objections, in *ibid.*, 2:109. Note the at least verbal discrepancy here with the text cited in note 18; here it is said that we *can* ask for the *efficient* cause of everything, including God; in the former text this was not required.

20. *Ibid.*, 2:114.

21. See both before and after the above texts in Replies I and IV.

22. If the antitheist continued to object, “If you allow one being (God) to be self-caused, why not allow the same to the world or any being in it?” Descartes could easily reply, first, that self-caused here does not mean bringing itself into existence from previous nonexistence, and secondly, that the starting point of the argument was precisely the discovery of some defect in a being that rendered it incapable of being self-caused or self-grounded.

23. Bertrand Russell and F. C. Copleston, SJ, “A Debate on the Existence of God,” in *The Existence of God*, ed. John Hick (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 175. See also the discussion following my second article cited in note 13.

24. See John F. Bannan, “Merleau-Ponty on God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1966): 341–65; Frans Vandenbussche, SJ, “The Idea of God in Merleau-Ponty,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1967): 45–67.

25. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1965.

26. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, SJ, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 672–73.

27. See the references in note 13.

6. THE PROBLEM OF THE REALITY AND MULTIPLICITY OF DIVINE IDEAS IN CHRISTIAN NEOPLATONISM

1. See Plato’s famous description of the ideas as “the really real” (*to ontos on*) in *Phaedo* 65–66 and other classic discussions of the ideas.

2. See *Parmenides* 132b–c:

But, Parmenides, said Socrates, may it not be that each of these Forms is a thought, which cannot properly exist anywhere but in a mind. In that way each of them can be one and the statements that have just been made would no longer be true of it.

Then, is each Form one of these thoughts and yet a thought of nothing?

No, that is impossible.

So it is a thought of something?

Yes.

Of something that is, or of something that is not?

Of something that is.

(*Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides’ “Way of Truth” and Plato’s “Parmenides,”* trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford [New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957], 91.)

3. See *Ennead* VI, 7, 15–16, and occasionally through V, 1–2. In these passages the Ideas are spoken of as the product of the Intellectual-Principle.

4. Plotinus, *Ennead* V, 9, 7–8, in *The Enneads*, ed. B. S. Page, trans., Stephen MacKenna, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 438–39. See also V, 3; VI, 6, 7–8; and off and on throughout V, 1–2. The essence of the position is that *Nous* and its objects constitute a single interdependent relational unity, neither properly prior to the other, but constituted together as a unitary life *simultaneously* by the overflow of the Good. But see VI, 6, 8 for a priority of being over *Nous*: “First, then, we take Being as first in order; then the Intellectual-Principle . . . Intellectual-Principle as the Act of Real Being, is a second” (Page-MacKenna, 547 n. 3). The Greek texts here are entirely clear, the terms used being *pro*, *proteron*, etc.

5. This doctrine is clear, explicit, and constant throughout the *Enneads*. See V, 1, 4; V, 6; V, 3, 10–15; V, 6; V, 9, 6; VI, 6, 9; VI, 7, 13 and 17. The

intellectual realm is always a one-many, both because Being as object is distinct from the act that knows it and because each Being-Idea is distinct from every other, though not divided from it.

6. Anton Pegis has admirably summed up the dilemma posed to Christian thought by the Platonic world of ideas: “St. Augustine . . . thought to baptize the Platonic Forms and to make them ideas in the mind of God. But this was easier to assert than to accomplish philosophically. For the perplexing mystery of the Platonic Forms is that in a Christian world they can be neither God nor creatures. They cannot be creatures because they are immutable and eternal; and they cannot be God because they are a real plurality of distinct and distinctly determined essences. Yet they rose before the minds of Christian thinkers again and again, and they hovered somewhere on the horizon between God and creatures, strange aliens both from heaven and from earth, and yet aliens whose message proved so enduringly dear to Christian thinkers that, rather than forget it, they exhausted their energies in pursuing it.” “The Dilemma of Being and Unity,” in *Essays in Thomism*, ed. Robert Brennan, OP (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), 158–59. The whole article, in fact, is a brilliant example of a truly philosophical study in depth of the history of philosophy.

7. See for example his famous brief treatise on the ideas, *De Diversis Quaestionibus* LXXXIII, 46 (Migne, *PL*, 40, 29–31), and other standard references.

8. See F.-J. Thonnard, “Ontologie augustinienne,” *L’Année théologique augustinienne* 14 (1954): 41–53, esp. 42–43. Clear texts are in Augustine *De Trinitate*, V, 2, 3: “Ab eo quod est esse dicta est essentia,” and *De Immortalitate Animae* XII, 19: “Omnis enim essentia non ob aliud essentia est, nisi quia est.”

9. *De Trinitate*, V, 2, 3 (Migne, *PL*, 42, 912).

10. *Sermo*, VII, 7 (Migne, *PL*, 38, 66).

11. *De Moribus Manichaeorum*, VII, 7 (Migne, *PL*, 32, 1347–48).

12. *De Natura Boni Contra Manichaeos*, I, 19 (Migne, *PL*, 42, 557). On the above texts see Vernon J. Bourke, *St. Augustine’s View of Reality* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1964), and James F. Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being: A Metaphysical Essay* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965).

13. It has been called to my attention, however, by the Augustinian scholar Robert J. O’Connell, SJ, that Augustine, in *Confessions* X, c. 9–12, when speaking about memory, distinguished between the *sensible images* of past contingent events, such as going to the Tiber River, and the *intellectual intuition* of numbers and their relations, which intuition puts us in contact with the *very things themselves* (*res ipsae*), with the very reality of numbers, which *truly are* (*valde sunt*), hence buried deep in our intellectual memory, which is always in contact with the immutable and eternal truths of the intelligible world through divine illumination. Now since, as *rationes aeternae*, numbers are certainly on a par

with all the other *rationes aeternae*, it would seem necessary to conclude by analogy that all the *rationes aeternae* are also *res ipsae, et valde sunt* (c. 12). Yet Augustine never quite seems to go this far or work out the implications.

14. On John Scottus Eriugena's doctrine, see Maïeul Cappuyns, OSB, *Jean Scot Érigène* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1933); Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964); Jean Trouillard, "Érigène et la théophanie créatrice," in *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973) 98–113; Tullio Gregory, *Giovanni Scoto Eriugena* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1963), chap. 1: "Dall' Uno al Molteplice"; and the standard histories of Étienne Gilson, etc.

15. See *De Divisione Naturae*, II, c. 36, in *Johannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972) 9:205–13. See also other main discussions of the primordial causes, *De Divisione Naturae*, III, c. 1–17, in *John the Scot: Periphyseon: On the Division of Nature*, trans Myra L. Uhlfelder, with summaries by Jean A. Potter (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 123–98.

16. *De Divisione Naturae*, II, c. 4–9. Thus material things exist more perfectly even in the mind of man, as spiritual, than in themselves.

17. *De Divisione Naturae*, III, c. 1: "The first causes themselves are, in themselves, one, simple, defined by no known order, and unseparated from one another. Their separation is what happens to them in their effects. In the monad, while all numbers subsist in their reason alone, no number is distinguished from another; for all are one and a simple one, and not a one compounded from many . . . Similarly the primordial causes while they are understood as stationed in the Beginning of all things, viz., the only-begotten Word of God, are a simple and undivided one; but when they proceed into their effects, which are multiplied to infinity, they receive their numerous and ordered plurality, . . . all order in the highest Cause of all and in the first participation in it is one and simple distinguished by no differentiae; for there all orders are indistinguishable, since they are an inseparable one, from which the multiple order of all things descends" (Uhlfelder, 129 n. 15).

18. Thus in *Ennead* VI, 6, 9 in the order of Being in the *Nous* number is declared to be already *unfolded*, not as it is in the Monad or One. In V, 3, 15, all the ideas are unfolded as distinct in the *Nous*, which thus becomes a one-many, whereas the One should not be said to contain all things as in an indistinct total. See the other texts in note 5. Thus what Eriugena describes as the mode of the primordial causes in the Word is explicitly denied by Plotinus of the divine *Nous* and could be applied only to the One, in which the ideas could in no way be said to be present.

19. *De Divisione Naturae*, II, c. 20, Sheldon-Williams, 77 n. 15.

20. *Ibid.*, II, c. 8, Sheldon-Williams, 29. For this identity of the being of things with the thought of them, see Bett, cited in n. 14, pp. 51, 145; "Gli

esseri nella mente di Dio si risolvono nell'atto con cui egli li conosce" (Gregory, 12 n. 14).

21. See Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), chap. 3, "Platonism in the Twelfth Century"; Nikolaus M. Häring, SAC, *Life and Works of Clarembald of Arras, a Twelfth-Century Master of the School of Chartres* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1965).

22. Clarembald of Arras, *Tractatus super Librum Boetii De Trinitate*, II, 41, in Häring, 123.

23. Ibid., II, 29–30, "Forma sine materia est ens a se, actus sine possibilitate, necessitas, aeternitas . . . et ipsa Deus est" (Häring, 118).

24. Thierry of Chartres' commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, called *Librum Hunc de Trinitate*: "Omnium formae in mente divina consideratae una quodammodo forma sunt, in formae divinae simplicitatem inexplicabili quodam modo relapsae" (*Der Kommentar des Clarembaldus von Arras zu Boethius De Trinitate*, ed. Wilhelm Jansen [Breslau: Müller & Seiffert, 1926], 18).

25. See note 21.

26. *Tractatus super Librum Boetii De Trinitate*, I, 34: "Omnis multitudo in simplicitate unitatis complicata latitat, et cum in serie numerandi post unam alterum et post alterum tertium numeratur, et deinceps tunc demum certa pluralitatis ab unitate profluentis forma cognoscitur, sicque sine alteritate nulla potest esse pluralitas" (Häring, 99).

27. Bonaventure, *De Scientia Christi*, q. 2, Conclusio, Respondeo, in *Obras de San Buenaventura*, Edicion Bilingüe, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1957), 2:138. See also q. 3.

28. Cf. the standard treatments of the "Thomistic existentialism," introduced by Saint Thomas: Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), the famous chapter 1 on "Existence and Reality"; Joseph de Finance, SJ, *Être et Agir*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1960); and my own summaries: "What Is Really Real?" in *Progress in Philosophy*, ed. James A. McWilliams, SJ (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1955), 61–90, and "What is Most and Least Relevant in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Today?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1974): 411–34.

29. For Thomas's treatments on the divine ideas, see *Summa contra Gentiles*, IV, c. 13, no. 10; *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 15 entire; I, q. 44, a. 3; I, q. 18, a. 4: "Whether All Things are Life in God"; *De Veritate*, q. 3, q. 4, a. 6 and 8. The description of the divine ideas as "invented" by God is in *De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 2 ad 6 m; as *rationes quasi excogitatas* is in *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 11 m.

30. For Thomas's fundamental criticism of the Platonic realism of ideas, see *Metaphysica*, I, 10; *De Anima*, I, 4; and the general discussion with texts in

R. J. Henle, SJ, *St. Thomas and Platonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), part 2, chap. 4: “Basic Principles of the *Via Platonica*.”

31. Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, VI, c. 8.

32. See, for example, the great Flemish mystic, Jan Ruusbroec. “According to the Flemish mystic, man’s true essence (*wesen*) is his super-essence (*over-wesen*). Before its creation the soul is present to God as a pure image; this divine image remains its super-essence after its actual creation.” Louis Dupré, *Transcendent Selfhood: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life* (New York: Seabury, 1976), 103–4.

33. See the texts in note 29, in particular *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 18, a. 4; *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 8; *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, c. 13, n. 10, in *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1955), 4:96, and the special article just on this point, *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 6: “Whether Things are More Truly in the Word than in Themselves.” *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum*, I, d. 36, q. 1, a. 3 *ad 2 m* (M837): four modes of *esse creaturae*.

Saint Thomas’s point is that if one looks at the mode of being of the thing in itself and in an idea (God’s or man’s), the *mode of being* in an idea, especially the divine idea, is a *spiritual* mode, identical with the being of the mind thinking it, hence from this point of view higher than the material being of a thing in itself; but if one considers the *proper mode* of a thing’s *own being* as this thing, this is found only in the thing’s own material being and not in its idea. Properly speaking, a thing’s own being is not found in its idea. Thus Saint Thomas is able to preserve intact the traditional formulas about the existence of things in the Word as more perfect, but the meaning he gives to them is notably different from their original intention, where his distinctions were not yet made.

34. Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibeta*, IX, 2, cited in the fine study by Jean Paulus, *Henri de Gand: Essai sur les Tendances de sa Métaphysique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1938), 91 n. 1.

35. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 14, a. 5 and a. 7–14.

36. See the illuminating remarks on Henry and his place in the history of our problem by Anton Pegis, “The Dilemma of Being and Unity,” cited in note 6, esp. 172–76.

37. *Sententiarum*, I, d. 35, q. 5; cited in Pegis, “The Dilemma of Being and Unity,” 170.

38. *Sententiarum*, I, d. 35, q. 5, C, in Gabriel Biel, *Collectorium super quattuor libros Sententiarum* (Tübingen: Johann Otmar für Friedrich Meynberger, 1501); cited in Pegis, “The Dilemma of Being and Unity,” 159.

39. *Sententiarum*, I, d. 17, q. 1, a. 3, K; Pegis, “The Dilemma of Being and Unity,” 171.

40. Cited in note 6, 168–72.

7. IS THE ETHICAL EUDAEMONISM OF SAINT THOMAS TOO SELF-CENTERED?

1. John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, III, Suppl. Distinction 26; see Allan Wolter, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 179–205.
2. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996.
3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 1.
4. See Matthew 16:25–26.
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 5.

8. CONSCIENCE AND THE PERSON

1. For good introductions to the concept of conscience, see the three articles on “Conscience” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), vol. 4, cols. 196–203; by Seán Fagan, SM, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 226–30; and by Rudolf Hoffmann in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury, 1975), 283–88; see also *Conscience: Its Freedom and Limitations*, ed. William Bier, SJ (New York: Fordham University Press, 1971); Walter E. Conn, *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1981); Philippe Delhay, *The Christian Conscience* (New York: Desclee Co., 1968); Léon Elders, OP, “La doctrine de la conscience de Saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue thomiste* 83 (1983): 533–57. For what is specific to Christian morality, I have found very useful and insightful the book by Richard M. Gula, SS, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

2. Phillip V. Lewis, “Defining ‘Business Ethics’: Like Nailing Jello to a Wall,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 4 (1985): 377.

3. See Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Stachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950), 68, 70; *Civilization and its Discontents*, in vol. 21 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Stachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1927–31), 123–32, 136–37.

4. Cf. the article by Léon Elders, OP (cited in note 1), and Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, q. 17; *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 19.

5. See James Henry Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986; orig. pub. 1912), for heart as seat of the mind (44), as seat of invisible intelligence (55), and as seat of consciousness, feeling, and mental powers (59). See Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), to see that in Ancient Egyptian thought the heart stood for the will, consciousness, and memory as mental media of connectivity (29), and as the “moral self” (30).

6. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* (1797), trans. James Ellington (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 100.
7. *Gaudium et Spes* 16, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, gen. ed., Austin Flannery, OP, rev. ed. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988, orig. pub. 1975), 916.
8. Ibid.
9. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Seneca ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, letter 41.1.
10. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, q. 17, a. 5.
11. See Jacques Maritain, “On Knowledge through Connaturality,” *Review of Metaphysics* 4 (1951): 473–81; Anthony Moreno, OP, “The Nature of St. Thomas’ Knowledge ‘Per Connaturalitatem,’” *Angelicum* 47 (1970): 44–62; Andrew Tallon, “Connaturality in Aquinas and Rahner,” *Philosophy Today* 28 (1984): 138–47.
12. Hoffmann, “Conscience,” cited in note 1, 285A.
13. Johannis Duns Scoti, *Reportata Parisiensia*, II, d. 6, q. 2, n. 10 in *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Vivès, 1894), 22: 622. See also William of Ockham, *Quaestiones et decisiones in quattuor libros Sententiarum*, I, d. 48, q. 1 in Gabrielis Biel, *Collectortium circa quattuor Sententiarum* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), 1:767–70; Guillelmi de Ockham, *Sententiarum*, II, q. 15 in *Opera Theologica*, ed. Gedeon Gál, OFM and Rega Wood (St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1981), 5:352.
14. *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 5 ad 4.
15. *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 4; *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 19, a. 5.
16. M.-D. Chenu, OP, *L’éveil de la conscience dans la civilisation médiévale* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1969), 54.
17. *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 5 ad 4.
18. Hermann Rauschnig, *The Voice of Destruction: Conversations With Hitler* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1940), 77–78. Regarding the authenticity of the remark, see Theodor Schieder, *Hermann Rauschnigs “Gesprache mit Hitler” als Geschichtsquelle* (Oplanden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1972), 31 n. 35; 19 n. 25.
19. See Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith*, chaps. 4 and 5. Cf. also John W. Glaser, SJ, “Conscience and Superego: A Key Distinction,” *Theological Studies* 32, no. 1 (1971), 30–47; Timothy C. Potts, OP, ed., *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Walter G. Jeffko, *Contemporary Ethical Issues: A Personalistic Perspective* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999); Edouard-Henri Wéber, *La Personne humaine au XIIIe siècle: L’avènement chez les maîtres parisiens de l’acception moderne de l’homme* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1991); Ignace Lepp, *The Authentic Morality* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). The latter is good on the passage to personal conscience and affective love for the good as a stronger motive for personal morality than just knowledge of the good: “All efficacious morality must be supported by a mysticism” (87). The author’s history: atheist—Catholic—psychiatrist—priest.
20. Hoffmann, “Conscience,” cited in note 1, 286B.

9. DEMOCRACY, ETHICS, RELIGION: AN INTRINSIC CONNECTION

1. See Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, trans. John Waggoner (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); Manent, *Modern Liberty and its Discontents*, ed. and trans. Daniel J. Mahoney and Paul Seaton (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); Manent, *The City of Man*, trans. Marc A. Le Pain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Manent, *Tocqueville and the Ambiguities of Modern Liberty* (London: Institute of United States Studies, University of London, 2002); Manent, *A World Beyond Politics? A Defense of the Nation-State*, trans. Marc A. Le Pain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Manent, *Democracy Without Nations? The Fate of Self-Government in Europe*, trans. Paul Seaton (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007).

2. See the Buddha's "First Sermon, Known as the Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness or the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma," in *Buddhism: A Religion of Infinite Compassion*, ed. Clarence H. Hamilton (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 28–32; and "The Sermon at Benares" (Buddha's First Sermon) in Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha According to Old Records* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1921), 38–43.

3. This is especially true of Mahayana Buddhism, and is seen most strikingly in the *Lotus of the True Law*. See Raymond Van Over, ed., *The Near East and India*, vol. 1 of *Eastern Mysticism* (New York: New American Library, 1977), 206. See also "Buddha as savior" in Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha*, 6. According to Jamshed K. Fozdar, "In the *Mahapadana Suttanta* the divinity of the Buddha is unequivocally asserted" (Fozdar, *The God of Buddha* [New York: Asia Publishing House, 1973], 21). As Trevor Ling puts it, we see "the virtual deification of the Buddha as the blessed one" (Ling, *The Buddha: Buddhist Civilization in India and Ceylon* [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1976, orig. pub. 1973], 208). And we have the Buddha as the god beyond and over the gods in Edward J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha: As Legend and History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, orig. pub. 1927), 214.

4. See Frank Newport, "America Remains Predominantly Christian," Gallup News Service, April 21, 2000. Even in 2008, according to the latest Gallup Poll of May 8–11, ninety-four percent of Americans say they believe in God, or believe in a universal spirit or higher power.

5. See Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar, eds., *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 314–16. For further discussion of the erosion of public morality, see Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chap. 9; Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), chap. 1; James R. Millar and

Sharon L. Wolchik, eds., *The Social Legacy of Communism* (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1994), chaps. 1, 5, and 6.

10. WHAT CANNOT BE SAID IN SAINT THOMAS'S ESSENCE-EXISTENCE DOCTRINE

1. For a fuller summary, with references to standard sources and authorities, see my own articles: "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism," *The New Scholasticism* 26 (1952): 167–94; and "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 26 (1952): 147–57.

2. Plotinus, *Ennead* VI, 8, 11, in *Plotinus*, ed. Arthur Hilary Armstrong, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), 56–57.

3. Plotinus, *Ennead* VI, 7, 38, in *The Enneads*, ed. B. S. Page, trans., Stephen MacKenna, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 414.

4. See for example Dale W. Cannon, "Dwelling in the World Through Language," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1972): 19–42.

5. For example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 1: "All other things besides God are not their own *esse* but participate *esse*. It is therefore necessary that all those things which are diversified according to diverse participation in existence [*participationem essendi*] should be caused by one first being, which is most perfectly." See also *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 5.

6. William of Ockham, *Collectorium Circa Quattuor Libros Sententiarum*, I, d. 2, q. 6, EE (Tübingen, 1501), and Philotheus Boehner, OFM, "Scotus' Teaching According to Ockham: II. On the *Natura Communis*," *Franciscan Studies* 6 (1946): 369–75.

7. *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 26: "What is common to many is not something aside from the many save in intelligibility [*nisi sola ratione*]. Therefore much less is *esse commune* itself anything beside all existing things, save only in the mind." *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 75, a. 5, *ad* 1: "The first act is the universal principle of all acts . . . Hence it is participated by things, not as a part, but according to the diffusion of its procession [*secundum diffusionem processionis ipsius*]."

8. This idea of intentionality as the root of the unity of the universe I first picked up from André Hayen, SJ, *L'intentionnel dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1942), and more clearly in his article, "L'intentionnalité de l'être et Métaphysique de la participation," *Revue néoscholastique de philosophie* 42 (1939): 385–410.

9. See my commentary, "The Being of Creatures: Critique of G. Phelan's Paper," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 31 (1957):

128–32, and the fundamental statement of the “thin-essence” view by William E. Carlo, *The Ultimate Reducibility of Essence to Existence in Existential Metaphysics*, preface by W. Norris Clarke (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1966), enlarged from the article in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1962): 557–90.

II. LIVING ON THE EDGE: THE HUMAN PERSON AS “FRONTIER BEING” AND MICROCOSM

1. In view of the importance of these notions, it is surprising how little has been written specifically on their history. I have gotten most help from the following: Rudolph Allers, “Microcosmos: From Anaximandros to Paracelsus,” *Traditio* 2 (1944): 309–407; Gérard Verbeke, “Man as a ‘Frontier’ according to Aquinas,” in *Aquinas and Problems of His Time*, ed. Gérard Verbeke and D. Verhelst (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1976), 195–203; Kallistos Ware, “The Unity of the Human Person According to the Greek Fathers,” in *Persons and Personality: A Contemporary Inquiry*, ed. Arthur Peacocke and Grant Gillette, (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 197–206; George Boas, *The History of Ideas: An Introduction*, particularly the chapter on microcosm (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 212–38; Don Parry Norford, “Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-Century Literature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38 (1977): 409–28; Marian Kurdzialek, “Der Mensch als Abbild des Kosmos,” *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 8 (1971): 35–75.

2. *Timaeus*, 35A; cp. 34–35; *Philebus*, 30A. In Plotinus, the role of soul in general, as the third and least unified of the two great divine emanations from the One, is to look upwards at the eternal, immutable world of Ideas in the divine Intellect and then spell out this perfect vision in time as the moving image of eternity. The World Soul does this with eternal, unwavering fidelity as it governs the whole material cosmos; but the human soul, less powerful and stable than the World Soul, instead of remaining in docile communion with the World Soul, can be seized with desire to become independent and run its own show, that is, govern its own human body, and in so doing become so absorbed in its bodily life that it turns its eyes away from the guiding vision of the divine Ideas, loses its balance, and falls into imprisonment, bewitchment, by the body. Thus the World Soul lives well above the frontier of time and eternity; the human soul tends to fall below it.

3. Plotinus, *Ennead* IV, 4, 3 in *The Enneads*, ed. B. S. Page, trans. Stephen MacKenna, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 290.

4. Plotinus, *Ennead* IV, 4, 2, *Ibid.*, 289.

5. Plotinus, *Ennead* IV, 8, 4, *Ibid.*, 361.

6. Werner Jaeger, *Humanistische Reden und Vorträge* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1937), 170.

7. John Burnet cites this as Fragment 85 of Heraclitus, but it is not found in other standard collections. See John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1930), 151.

8. *Philebus*, 28d–30c. There seems, in fact, to be a gradation of imaging: Demiurge, world (with its own immanent governing Soul), state, soul. It is somewhat debated whether the projection comes from the bottom up or the top down, although I think the latter is more probable.

9. Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII, 2, 252b.

10. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, II, 30, 9; IV, 20, 7 (Migne, *PG*, 7/1, 822; 7/1, 1032).

11. Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus*, V, 2 (*Griechische und Lateinische Schriftsteller*, 2, 336).

12. Nilus of Ancyra, *Letters*, II, 119 (Migne, *PG*, 79, 252b).

13. Gregory of Nazianzen, *Orations*, 38, 11 (Migne, *PG*, 36, 321c–324b). Similarly Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (Migne, *PG*, 44, 177d–180a).

14. Nemesius of Emesa, *De Natura Hominis*, I, 2–11, trans. Burgundio of Pisa, ed. Gérard Verbeke and J. R. Moncho (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).

15. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

16. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 41 (Migne, *PG*, 91, 1305a–c).

17. Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei*, IX, 13: “Man is a kind of middle being, between the angels and the beasts, below the angels and above the beasts, sharing mortality with the beast and reason with the angels.”

18. We have only a fourteen-line fragment of what may be a larger work. It is translated and discussed in the fine work of James McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 371–72.

19. *De Confessione*, translated by McEvoy in his *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, *ibid.*, 408. McEvoy’s chapter 6, “The Place of Man in the Cosmos,” is a mine of information on the microcosmic thinking of Grosseteste, its relation to his sources and his contemporaries (St. Bonaventure, etc.), and its humanistic implications.

On Saint Bonaventure see James McEvoy, “Microcosm and Macrocosm in the Writings of St. Bonaventure,” in his *S. Bonaventura 1274–1974* (Rome: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1973), 2:309–43.

20. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum*, III, Prologus. See also *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 77, a. 2: “Man is on the boundary (*confinium*) of spiritual and corporeal creatures.”

21. *Liber de Causis*, II, 26.

22. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 77, a. 2.

23. *Sententiarum*, II, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3.

24. *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, IV, q. 3.

25. Cited in note 11.

26. See Anton C. Pegis, “St. Thomas and the Unity of Man,” in *Progress in Philosophy: Philosophical Studies in Honor of Rev. Doctor Charles A. Hart*, ed. James A. McWilliams, SJ (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1955), 153–73.

27. Nicholas of Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia*, III, 3, 198.
28. Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. A. Robert Caponigri (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1956).
29. Another characteristic expression of the same idea, familiar to all of us, is found in the sketches and illustrations in books (*Vitruvian Man* by Leonardo da Vinci) in which the heroic figure of a man with arms and legs outstretched fills the center of the circular cosmos and touches all its extremities, holding it all together in unity and expressing its meaning.
30. See John Herman Randall, Jr., *The Career of Philosophy from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 183–4. He makes the point that the Cartesian distinction between mind and matter puts an end to the Renaissance attempt “to interpret nature as essentially like man—to display man as natural and nature as human. Far from being macrocosm and microcosm, the two were henceforth to be sharply sundered.”
31. Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna*: “Man is an excerpt of the whole *machina mundi*, a microcosm.” Quoted and discussed in Allers (cited in note 1), 399.
32. A Lutheran acquaintance of mine has cautioned me that, to be precise, Lutherans hold that it is not human nature that has been corrupted but only its power to relate itself religiously to God. The Calvinist position is stronger.
33. See Norford (cited in note 1), 409–28. The author shows how, despite the continuing use of microcosmic terms and images, the distancing between man and nature is already beginning, with the poet tending to retire more into his inner world, using external nature more as a stimulus for his own inner creative imagination than as a model. See also Georges Poulet, *Studies in Human Time*, trans. Elliot Coleman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), on this same period: “Human thought no longer feels itself a part of things. It distinguishes itself from them in order to reflect upon them, and thus is no longer upheld by their own power of enduring” (13).
34. Paul D. McLean, MD, “On the Evolution of Three Mentalities,” in *New Dimensions in Psychiatry: A World View*, ed. Silvano Arieti and Gerard Chrzanowski (New York: Wiley, 1975), 2: 305–28. In this austere scientific article the author does not touch on the ethical implications which he brought out in his more popular seminars.

12. THE METAPHYSICS OF RELIGIOUS ART: REFLECTIONS ON A TEXT OF SAINT THOMAS

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 7.
2. For a good explanation of the meaning of symbol and its role in religious experience and worship, see Thomas Fawcett, *The Symbolic Language of Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971).

3. *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), 1: 808–10.

4. The entire book by Karl Rahner, SJ, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych, SJ (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), is an extended commentary on this one article of Saint Thomas. Although we do not agree with all the details of the author's interpretation, his exposition of the main point of the text—the dependence of all our human knowing on the senses as starting point—is very rich and illuminating.

5. For a convenient reference, see “The Metaphysical Ascent to God,” part 2 in my *The Philosophical Approach to God: A New Thomistic Perspective*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

6. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 12; I, q. 43, a. 7: “Now the nature of man requires that he be led by the hand to the invisible by visible things [*ut per visibilia ad invisibilia manuducatur*].”

7. For the medieval Franciscan doctrine of the two faces of the soul, as proposed by Saint Bonaventure, see Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 335–38.

8. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima*, art. 17 (my trans.): “For it is manifest that the human soul united to the body has, by reason of its union with the body, its face turned toward what is beneath it; hence it is not brought to fulfillment except by what it receives from these lower things, namely by forms [*species*] abstracted from phantasms. Hence it cannot arrive at the knowledge either of itself or of other things except insofar as it is led by the hand by these abstracted forms.”

9. This key notion of the unrestricted dynamism of the human spirit, intellect, and will toward the unlimited horizon of being as true and good, and ultimately to the Infinite Fullness of being itself as the ultimate Source of all being, is clearly found in Saint Thomas, most explicitly in his doctrine of the natural desire for the beatific vision. But its highlighting as the foundation for all metaphysics, epistemology, and natural theology is due to the Transcendental Thomist School, e.g., Joseph Maréchal, Karl Rahner, Joseph F. Donceel, and Bernard J. F. Lonergan. For a convenient exposition, see “The Turn to the Inner Way in Contemporary Neo-Thomism,” chapter 1 in my *The Philosophical Approach to God*, cited previously in note 5.

10. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, I, 3, 589C; *The Mystical Theology*, I, 3, 1000C–1001A.

11. See *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 12, and elsewhere.

12. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950, orig. pub 1923), 70. See his whole treatment in chap. 9, sec. 3: “The Means by Which the Numinous Is Expressed in Art.”

13. Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), chaps. 3 and 4.

14. John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation 17* (London: Printed for Thomas Jones, 1624), 415.

15. Rudolf Otto warns us, however, against putting too much stress on the social context as a necessary condition for understanding the religious character of art: “This numinous-magical character is especially noticeable in the strangely impressive figures of the Buddha in early Chinese art; and here too it affects the observer independently of ‘ideas,’ that is, without his knowing anything about the speculative doctrines of Buddhism. Thus Siren justly says of the great Buddha from the Lung-Men Caves (T’ang Dynasty): Anyone who approaches this figure will realize that it has a religious significance without knowing anything about its *motif*. . . It matters little whether we call it a prophet or a god, because it is a complete work of art permeated by a spiritual will, which communicates itself to the beholder . . . The religious element of such a figure is immanent; it is a ‘presence’ or an atmosphere rather than a formulated idea . . . It cannot be described in words, because it lies beyond intellectual definition.” (*The Idea of the Holy* [cited in note 12], 81)

16. “A second concept . . . treated by Churchmen with a marked degree of sociological naiveté is that of *intelligibility* in rite. The notion that the more intelligible the sign, the more effectively it will enter the lives of the faithful is implausible to the sociological imagination . . . A certain opacity is essential to symbolic action in the sociologists’ account, so that to attempt to render symbols wholly transparent is, to their mind, a thoroughly misguided proceeding . . . Symbols embody what is not available to rational manipulation.” Aidan Nichols, OP, *Looking at the Liturgy: A Critical View of its Contemporary Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 61.

17. Horst Schwebel, “Modes of Transcendence In Modern Art,” *Theology Digest* 44, no. 4 (1997): 341–43.

13. THE IMMEDIATE CREATION OF THE HUMAN SOUL BY GOD AND SOME CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

1. Tertullian, *De Anima*, 27.

2. Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, trans. Peter Hünermann, 37th ed. (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1991), no. 685, 312.

3. *Ibid.*, no. 3220, 866.

4. *Ibid.*, no. 3896, 1097–98.

5. John Paul II, “Ad Pontificiae Academiae Scientiarum sodales,” October 24, 1996, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 89 (1997): 186–90.

6. Karl Rahner, SJ, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965); Rahner, “Christology Within an Evolutionary View of the World,” in Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961–), 5:157–92; Rahner,

"The Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger, in *ibid.*, 6:153–77.

7. Warren S. Brown, Nancey C. Murphy, and H. Newton Malony, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul?: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

8. The principal manifesto of the group is, as I have noted above, *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* A second rich source book for both sides of the question is the record of the Vatican Observatory Conference, *Neuroscience and the Person: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell et al., (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory; Berkeley, CA: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1999; distributed by the University of Notre Dame Press). Despite the origin of this volume being a conference sponsored by the Vatican Observatory, a small but significant majority of the authors in this volume seem to me to lean towards the nonreductive physicalist position. The two leading philosophers of the group seem to me to be Nancey Murphy and Philip Clayton, of the Philosophy Department of California State University at Sonoma. Key articles by Murphy can be found in *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, chap. 1 and especially chap. 6: "Nonreductive Physicalism: Philosophical Issues," and the considerably more scholarly article in *Neuroscience and the Person*, "Supervenience and the Downward Efficacy of the Mental: A Nonreductive Physicalist Account of Human Action," 147–64. Articles by Philip Clayton can be found in *Neuroscience and the Person*, "Neuroscience, the Person, and God: An Emergentist Account," 181–214, and the long article, "Neuroscience, the Person, and God: An Emergentist Account," *Zygon* 35 (2000): 613–52. Nancey Murphy has done a large amount of work in this field and is the best known, but Clayton seems to me to have a deeper appreciation of the spiritual and to be less reductionist. Few, if any of the authors, however, are sympathetic to the idea of the immediate creation of the human soul by God.

9. A representative sample of this widespread antipathy among Protestant thinkers today towards any kind of dualism is the article of the well-respected philosopher and theologian, Lynne Rudder Baker, "Need a Christian be a Mind/Body Dualist?" *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 489–504. Her answer is "No! And if you don't have to be, you should not be." Sympathy for this position, with special opposition to the need for an immediate creation of the human soul by God, is also shown by the Catholic philosopher of science Ernan McMullin in "Evolution and Special Creation," *Zygon* 28 (1993): 299–335, and "Biology and the Theology of the Human," in *Controlling Our Destinies: Historical, Philosophical, Ethical, and Theological Perspectives on the Human Genome Project*, ed. Phillip R. Sloan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 367–93.

The opposition of Nancey Murphy to dualism closely reflects the majority position of analytic philosophers working on the mind-body problem. Jaegwon Kim, one of the leaders in the field, gives us an insightful survey of the field, “The Mind-Body Problem: Taking Stock after Forty Years,” in *Mind, Causation, and the World*, ed. James E. Tomberlin, Philosophical Perspectives (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 11:185–209. He admits quite frankly that the majority of analytic philosophers working in this field, including himself, come to the problem with a prior commitment to physicalism, stemming from their respect for neuroscience, and then try their best to compensate by some theory of the “supervenience” of higher properties on a lower physical subject, that is, the equivalent of some variety of nonreductive physicalism. He frankly concedes that he doesn’t think they have made much convincing progress in the project over forty years, and that “supervenience” is more a new verbal affirmation of a position than a satisfactory explanation. I agree.

10. This same basic critique, that the emergence of new irreducible properties with top-down causal influence on lower behavior requires the emergence of a new higher nature and thus a new ontological level of entity or being, not merely a new level of irreducible properties in a lower-level agent, has been made by a number of philosophers. See for example William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), where he insists that as a result of its irreducible higher operations the human self is definitely a being on a higher ontological level than the animals, although he is not yet willing to admit that this new nature contains anything strictly immaterial, let alone requiring a special act of divine intervention to create it. He defends a widely held “emergentist metaphysics” of evolution, the emergence of genuinely higher levels of being from the lower levels preceding them simply in virtue of the creative potentialities latent in the whole system of nature. See the fine symposium on Hasker’s book with his reply and other articles defending the spirituality of the soul and its immediate creation by God, in the new journal sponsored by the Evangelical Philosophical Society, *Philosophia Christi* Ser. 2, no. 2 (2000): 163–207.

For a powerful philosophical critique of Nancey Murphy and nonreductive physicalism from the point of view of her treatment of causality, see Derek S. Jeffreys, “The Soul is Alive and Well: Non-reductive Physicalism and Emergent Mental Properties,” *Theology and Science* 2 (2004): 205–25, followed by a weak answer from her, 227–30.

11. Alicia Juarrero, *Dynamics in Action: Intentional Behavior as a Complex System* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 90, a. 2–3; *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, c. 49–50.

14. THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION: UNIQUE EXPRESSION OF OUR SOUL-BODY UNITY

1. Eva T. H. Brann, *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991).
2. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 7.
3. See Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 335–38.
4. Thomas Aquinas, *De Anima*, a. 17.
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 77, a. 1.
6. Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *On the Imagination* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971, orig. pub. 1930), 36–37.
7. *Ibid.*, 84–87.
8. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 9.
9. “What Life Meant to Einstein: An Interview by George Sylvester Viereck,” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929.
10. In this history I have been most helped by the following excellent works: Eva T. H. Brann, cited in note 1, a remarkable summa for topics and history; Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), history from ancient to modern; and Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), insightful.

15. THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION AS TREATED IN WESTERN THOUGHT

1. Plato, *Republic*, X.
2. *Ibid.*, Conclusion.
3. Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 7–9, 431a1–433a8.
4. Aristotle, *On Memory and Recollection*, I, 449b4–451a25.
5. Cornelius Castoriadis, *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 244.
6. Castoriadis, for example, suggests that Aristotle drops any further exploration since the product of the creative imagination fits nowhere within his ontological categories.
7. Synesius of Cyrene, *De Insomniis*, V (Migne, *PG*, 66, 1292–94).
8. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 78, a. 4.
9. *Ibid.*, I, q. 84, a. 7.
10. *Ibid.*, I, q. 85, a. 4 *ad* 1.
11. *Ibid.*, I–II, q. 77, a. 1.
12. *Ibid.*, II–II, q. 173, a. 2.
13. Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), chap. 4, 425 n. 1.

14. Ibid., 155.
15. Ibid., appendix 2 on Philoxenes, 145–46.
16. Guy Lardreau, *Discours philosophique et discours spirituel: Autour de la philosophie spirituelle de Philoxène de Mabboug* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985), 127.
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9. See my own development of receptivity as a positive ontological perfection in my *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993).

10. See John 17:7, John 16:15, and Luke 10:22.

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