



DYNAMIC
TRANSCENDENTALS

*Truth, Goodness, & Beauty from a
Thomistic Perspective*

ALICE M. RAMOS

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During the first year of my graduate studies in philosophy at the University of Navarra in Spain, Alejandro Llano, who was to be my dissertation director, suggested that I read the first question of Aquinas's *De Veritate*. That suggestion, for which I am so grateful, sparked my interest in the transcendentals and especially in the transcendentality of truth. I saw in Aquinas's thought the resources I needed to develop what I then called a metaphysics of the sign, a dissertation project that enabled me to make sense of some of my previous studies in contemporary semiotics. Since my return from Spain I have been fortunate to receive encouragement for my work from a number of philosophers. Ralph McInerny, whose Thomistic Institutes at the University of Notre Dame were always a source of inspiration, was especially supportive when he learned of my intention to write a book dealing with a dynamic interpretation of the transcendentals. The way I initially conceived of the book is somewhat different from the form it has taken here; the interpretation, however, remains the same.

In the past fifteen years my work on the transcendentals and on other themes in Aquinas and the Thomistic tradition has appeared in a number of publications. Some of the essays in this book are from previously published articles that have under-

gone either slight or significant revision. I am grateful for the permission to publish parts or the whole of the following articles: “A Metaphysics of the Truth of Creation: Foundation of the Desire for God,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 69 (1995): 237–48; “Beauty and the Perfection of Being,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 71 (1997): 255–68; “Beauty, Mind, and the Universe,” in *Beauty, Art, and the Polis*, ed. Alice Ramos (American Maritain Association, 2000, distributed by The Catholic University of America Press), 70–84; “The Dignity of Man and Human Action,” *Acta Philosophica* 10, no. 2 (2001): 315–21; “Evil and Providence: Toward a New Moral Order,” in *Faith, Scholarship, and Culture in the 21st Century*, ed. Alice Ramos and Marie I. George (American Maritain Association, 2002, distributed by The Catholic University of America Press), 269–79; “Moral Beauty and Affective Knowledge in Aquinas,” *Acta Philosophica* 13, no. 2 (2004): 321–37; “The Human Person as Image and Sign,” *Proceedings of the International Congress on Christian Humanism in the Third Millennium: The Perspective of St. Thomas Aquinas*: September 21–25, 2003, vol. 2 (Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas, 2005): 101–10; “Art, Truth, and Morality: Aesthetic Self-forgetfulness versus Recognition,” in *Mimesi, Verità, Fiction*, ed. Rafael Jiménez Cataño and Ignacio Yarza (Rome: EDUSC, 2009), 89–106; “Transcending Bodily Existence and Vulnerability,” in *Maritain and America*, ed. Christopher M. Cullen, S.J., and Joseph Allan Clair (American Maritain Association, 2009, distributed by The Catholic University of America Press), 179–91; “Toward the Recovery of the Moral Sense,” in *The Renewal of Civilization*, ed. Gavin T. Colvert (American Maritain Association Publication, 2010, distributed by The Catholic University of America Press), 99–109; book review of *Beauty* by Roger Scruton, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 1 (Fall 2010): 261–63. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the use of previously published material in Spanish: “*Mensura: Un Concepto neoplatónico en Tomás de Aquino*,” in

Metafísica y Antropología en el Siglo XII, ed. María Jesús Soto (Pamplona, Spain: EUNSA, 2005), 349–64; and “La Confrontación entre el amor y la incapacidad de amar,” in *Identidad cristiana*, ed. Antonio Aranda (Pamplona, Spain: EUNSA, 2007), 117–28.

I wish to note here that my collaboration in a research project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, under the direction of María Jesús Soto at the University of Navarra, was in part instrumental in my decision to seek the publication of this volume of essays. I am grateful to Dr. Soto for her interest in my work and for her friendship, which has remained firm throughout the years and despite the distance. There are many others both in the United States and abroad to whom I am indebted; some will find their work quoted in the pages that follow or duly acknowledged in a note; others whose names do not appear but with whom I have intellectual ties, or ties of friendship, should know that their understanding and kindness have been a great help to me.

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Lastly, this book honors the memory of my beloved mother, Dominga Méndez de Ramos. I am also indebted in a special way to my father, Alejandro Ramos Jr., for his constant encouragement and moral support.

DYNAMIC TRANSCENDENTALS

INTRODUCTION

The essays in this book have been in the making for over fifteen years. While they were initially devoted to the transcendentals in Thomas Aquinas, especially to truth and to beauty, the so-called forgotten transcendental,¹ they were not meant as a systematic treatment of these. In the past twenty years excellent studies on the transcendentals have been published, among them Jan Aertsen's masterful book titled *The Transcendentals and Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*.² In this book Aertsen points to the correlation between *anima* and being, between the transcendental openness of *anima* to all being, which makes the human being capable not only of knowing being but also capable of knowing God. For Aertsen, therefore, the anthropological motif of Aquinas's doctrine of the transcendentals converges with the theological motif. Aertsen also points to the connection between the transcendentals and morality, the former providing the metaphysical basis for the latter.³

My interest here lies not only in these connections suggest-

1. Jan Aertsen, *The Transcendentals and Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996). See the chapter on beauty, 335–59.

2. Besides Aertsen's book, see Jorge Gracia, editor of the special issue of *Topoi* 11, no. 2 (1992), devoted to *The Transcendentals in the Middle Ages*.

3. Aertsen, *The Transcendentals and Medieval Philosophy*, 431.

ed by Aertsen but also and more specifically in the role played by the human person in the perfection of the universe, in the return of all things to their source. Given the intellectual creature's place in the universe, the human person is responsible both for actualizing his own nature and for bringing everything else in the universe to perfection. In accomplishing this task the person also brings about what may be called an intensification of the transcendentals, such that those aspects of being that are said to be convertible with being and that are present to a greater or lesser degree in all beings acquire a higher level of actuality. We can thus say for example that although human persons are created true, they will through their proper operations maximize the degree of their truth (they will pass from being true *secundum quid* to being true *simpliciter*) and will bring all other things to the actualization of their truth and also of their goodness and beauty. To intensify the degree of participation in the transcendentals requires then a dynamic conception of the transcendentals rather than a static one, which is the standard consideration of the transcendentals as aspects inseparable from being.

Such a conception is made possible through an understanding of the human person as image of an exemplary cause, as *imago Dei*, a being intimately related to the wise and loving God who created him and destined him to freely return to Him. Aquinas's account of the human person as *imago Dei* is not static and ahistorical but is rather a dynamic and active conception of human nature. In having originated from a true and good God, the human person is naturally inclined to the true and the good; in his pursuit of truth and goodness he is, whether he knows it or not, actually pursuing God. Human perfection cannot therefore be separated from union with God or religious fulfillment.⁴ God as the exemplary cause of the *imago* is the measure of the human person in being and in activity and

4. See J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P., "*Imago Dei—Imago Christi: The Theological Foundations of Christian Humanism*," *Nova et Vetera* 2 (2004): 267–78.

in his return to the source. If the person is to achieve his end, if he is to perfect his nature and arrive at communion with God through his likeness to the Exemplar, the goods that the person pursues must be proportionate to the One True Good; disproportionate goods that are merely apparent goods and thus not true goods will only alienate him from his true end. In freely choosing true goods, the human person must, moreover, direct his actions to the ultimate true good; he must intend the right end and not act for the sake of some inferior or external good such as human glory. In other words, the person must act from love of God, love of the true good, rather than from a disordered love of self; only in this way is the person's transcendental openness to all being brought to perfection.

In this dynamic consideration of the human person and of the transcendentals, I am indebted not only to Aertsen's work on the transcendentals but also to the work of Joseph de Finance, Oliva Blanchette, Servais Pinckaers, and others. In his magnificent book *Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas*, de Finance emphasizes the radical dynamism of being in terms of the tendency of a created being to its own perfection, its tendency to action, and its return to its origin or beginning, a return which is the conversion or turning back of the effect to the cause.⁵ This tendency to the perfection of a creature's nature and its reversion to the cause also constitute the perfection of its participation in the transcendentals, such that the creature would be more true, more good, and more beautiful, as well as more one or united, because of its union with the source from which all being and the transcendentals originate.

Following in the footsteps of de Finance, Oliva Blanchette develops a teleological cosmology in his book *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*. Blanchette accords to the intel-

5. Joseph de Finance, S.J., *Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas* (Rome: Gregorian University Editions, 1969), 250, n. 95. It would be a great service to philosophers and theologians alike if this book were to be translated into English.

lectual creature the function of collecting, as it were, all things through its knowledge and of leading them back to the creator. In this way the human being compensates for the imperfection of things by knowing them and also provides for the final perfection of the universe.⁶ While the role of intelligence in the final form of the universe is marvelously developed by Blanchette, he does not to my knowledge associate the activity of intellectual creatures with an intensification of the transcendentals.

The work of Servais Pinckaers in ethics enables us to emphasize the relationship between the metaphysical order and the moral order. For Aquinas and the Church Fathers, morality is based on man's natural attraction to the true and the good, and it is precisely the virtues that foster the connaturality between the human person and the true good, the good in accordance with his place in the universe, with his dignity. Moreover, Pinckaers calls for a recovery of beauty in ethics,⁷ a task in great part in consonance with the project of these essays. Goodness and beauty are closely related; the splendor or beauty of virtuous acts which we behold may lead us to the experience of wonder, an experience which sets the philosopher, indeed every man, in search of the ultimate cause. The Greeks, too, spoke of the good in terms of the *kalon* and in fact combined the good and the beautiful in their *kalokagathia*.

Now that I have briefly referred to some of the major influences on my thought in these essays, I need also to point out that this project originally began as a speculative endeavor drawing attention to the relationship of creation to the divine intellect, as this is developed in particular in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* by Aquinas. However, once I focused on the return of creatures to their origin, on the role of intellectual creatures in

6. See Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 298–307.

7. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 31.

the perfection of the universe, the eminently practical and moral dimension of the project became more than evident. The essays here thus present not only virtuous activity as the way to man's actualization and that of the universe, but also focus on evil, suffering, human vulnerability, and even art to show that these experiences, too, can enable man through a kind of interior conversion to come in contact with his true self—a thoughtful self, with his natural desire for the true and the beautiful, with his longing for unification to the source of his being—and can thus put him on the way to perfection. In approaching this practical and moral side of my project I have drawn not only from the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas but also from contemporary thinkers such as Jacques Maritain, John Paul II, and others. By drawing from both present and past sources of perennial wisdom—in fact, from both philosophical and theological wisdom—these essays are meant in some way to shed light on contemporary culture and its perplexity regarding such questions as the meaning of human life, the age-old problem of evil and suffering, and the different senses of the beautiful in our world today.

It remains for me now in this introduction to discuss the organization of this work. I have chosen to group these essays into three parts. In the first part I follow Jonathan Lear's interpretation of Aristotle, which I see as closely related to Aquinas's interpretation of truth as the end and beginning of the universe. The truth of all created beings is grounded in the divine intelligence and is meant to be apprehended by the human mind. The latter has a natural desire to know not just created beings but the very cause of all things, and so this natural desire cannot be fully satisfied until the human mind is united to God who is the ultimate cause of the truth of all things. We see then in the first part that there is an affinity between intelligence and divinity. The divine mind or the exemplary cause from which freely proceeds the multiplicity of creatures that we observe in

the universe gives being with order, such that beings each have their place within a hierarchy of beings and are moreover ordered through their nature and proper activities to their end. The intimate connection that exists between exemplary causality and finality shows an Aquinas more indebted to Plato and Neoplatonism than to Aristotle, as we will see. In the ordering of creatures to their end, the intellectual creature has a fundamental role to play. Only the human person can bring all things to perfection and ultimately himself to the source of all truth. However, as both Aristotle and Aquinas saw only too clearly, the natural desire that exists in man for the good of his intellect, for the truth, can be frustrated for different reasons. Rectitude of the will is necessary to arrive at truth, and so the return of all things to the exemplary cause demands that man cultivate virtue. The pursuit and love of the truth requires the practice of fundamental virtues; access to truth calls for a certain asceticism and so recourse to Catholic wisdom, unlike postmodern thought, reminds us that an ethics of knowing is necessary if the human person is to actualize his natural desire for truth.

The second part begins with a consideration of the order and beauty of the universe. According to Aquinas, the order among the diversity of beings that compose the universe is “the chief beauty in things,” an order due to divine wisdom.⁸ Aquinas refers to God as an artist who makes images for the sake of the beautiful. All creatures are then either images or traces of God’s wise artistry. The human person as image of the divine artist, of the exemplar, cooperates through his own provident activity in giving the universe its final form, in the beautification of the universe (in the intensification of all the transcendentals in beings). What may be called the transfiguration of the human person and of the universe is made possible by human activity that radiates not only the light of reason and right

8. *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, c. 71.

appetite but that is ultimately directed by the light of grace; we will thus also refer to the theological foundation for the transformation of human life and the world.

Now, unlike many prevailing opinions, evil and suffering also have a place in the truth and beauty of the universe, in a universe that is open to further actualization. This is not to lessen the gravity of moral evil and human suffering, but simply to realize that while man's efforts against evil and suffering sometimes seem to be of no avail, God in His wisdom and omnipotence can draw good even from evil. Moreover, the experience of evil, of vulnerability, and of suffering can afford us moments of true self-discovery, whereby we realize the importance of higher goods, of the Highest Good, over lower goods. Attachment to lesser goods, such as pleasure, money, or human glory, can and does enslave the mind, so that the mind is not disposed to recognize its good, which is the truth. We therefore need to purify our attachments or our loves if we are to be united to the true good that as rational beings we desire. Moral evil along with suffering and vulnerability can also make us aware of the truth of our being, of our dignity, of our relation to others and especially to God. They are thus opportunities to return to the Exemplar through love, to turn back to God, so as to recover our original dignity and attain to that glory which is necessary for our happiness, that is, the approval of the creature by its maker.

In the third and final part I attempt to show that the true good, which I take to be the beautiful in the moral realm, is the proper object of natural reason, of practical reason. Only in choosing true goods can the human person be united to the One True Good. In reflecting on his actions the person can experience shame or joy: shame due to the dishonorable character of his action which is not truly good, an action not in keeping with his dignity, or joy due to the fittingness of the action to the truth of his being. Shame and joy are here found in the reason-

ing faculty and attest to the suitability of the true good, of the beauty of virtue, to reason as opposed to the unsuitability of the ugliness of vice to the human intellect. In addition, although the debased person does not act virtuously, he or she can still see or recognize the beauty of virtuous acts since the seeds of virtue, the natural inclinations to the true and the good, are present in his reason and in his will. Among the virtues, temperance in particular is characterized as the virtue of moral beauty and honor; without this virtue man cannot engage in the contemplative life, which according to Aquinas is where beauty is essentially found.⁹ That beauty should pertain to the contemplative life, to the joy of beholding the truth, is without a doubt not the prevalent conception of beauty in our world today. I end these essays with some reflections on art: authentic art and its beauty enables the human person to recognize his true identity, a being made for truth, goodness, and beauty; art can thus foster the natural desire to know, in whose satisfaction lies the joy of the mind. True art plays an important role in cultivating the affinity between intelligence and the true good, and ultimately the affinity between intelligence and that One True Good who is God. There is no doubt then that art is not indifferent to the perfection of man and of the universe.

Lastly, my intention in putting these essays together in a volume is twofold: to bring to completion a project which seems now more timely than when it was first conceived, and also to share with others whatever insights may be found in these pages. My hope now is that this volume may be of service to others who will be able to further develop what may be in only seed form here. If that is the case, then the labor of having worked on these essays and brought them to the light will have more than sufficiently been compensated. In any case making others participants of one's labor is always a gratifying task.

9. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3.

PART I 

TRUTH, MEASURE, AND VIRTUE

A METAPHYSICS OF THE TRUTH OF
CREATION *Foundation of the Desire for God*

The question of the natural desire for God as it is posed in Aquinas has been the source of much discussion and controversy throughout the centuries, from the revival of Scholasticism in the sixteenth century in which a purely natural end for man was hypothesized, to the late 1940s and early 1950s during which discussion centered on the compatibility between a natural end for man and Aquinas's theology of supernatural beatitude. During this latter period, Henri de Lubac's work on the supernatural flatly denounced man as a thing of nature and therefore argued that man has no natural end, only perfect beatitude which is supernatural, since its object is the transcendent being of God.¹ More recently, moral philosophers such as John Finnis and Alan Donagan have recognized the distinction between what has been named perfect and imperfect beatitude; the latter would be comparable to the Aristotelian thesis which identifies *eudaimonia* with contemplation. Yet, one could argue that if *eudaimonia*, reinterpreted as beatitude, is merely imperfect, then how could it possibly constitute the ultimate end of

1. See Gerald McCool, S.J., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

human life or how could it satisfy the deepest aspiration of human nature? If eudaimonia is then equated with imperfect beatitude and this can only be truly understood in reference to perfect beatitude which is supernatural, then it would seem that Aquinas's treatment of the Aristotelian doctrine of happiness ceases to be a philosophical one.²

Apart from the controversy between imperfect and perfect beatitude and whether this question is to be treated philosophically or theologically, I wish to show that given a certain interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics and theology that emphasizes the relationship between mind, the universe, and the divinity, it is possible to posit the Aristotelian world as "an expression of desire for God,"³ and thus by extension affirm that man does indeed have a natural desire for the supernatural, for that which transcends his nature. This interpretation does in effect identify the contemplative life with the happy life. Thus, we will not question, as some commentators of Aristotle have done, whether contemplation is in fact for the Philosopher the single best activity because it is the activity of the best part in man.⁴

It is further my contention that an interpretation of Aristotle that conceives the order of the world as a *response* to God⁵ coincides with Aquinas's treatment of the truth as the origin and end of the universe in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. It is here where Aquinas follows "the dynamic intellectualism of Aristotle" and gives "a more adequate realization to that most magnificent of Aristotelian ideas, the affinity between intelligence

2. See Kevin M. Staley, "Happiness: The Natural End of Man," *The Thomist* 53 (1989): 215–34.

3. Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 295. An interpretation of God as exemplary cause is in consonance with Aristotle's biological works, although in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle does shy away from such an interpretation. I am indebted to Alasdair MacIntyre and to W. Norris Clarke, S.J., for this clarification. I think that Lear's interesting interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics and theology may be seen in this light.

4. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 377.

5. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 295.

and divinity.”⁶ I wish also to point out in these introductory remarks that Aquinas’s reflections on the natural desire for God are meant to give an account of creatures as beings that are directed toward God and return to him as their final end.⁷ It is this return or inclination toward perfection that I will particularly emphasize in Aquinas. My interest here lies primarily in elaborating a metaphysics of the truth of creation as the ultimate explanation of the desire for God, which desire “lies at the root of the moral life.”⁸ I will begin then by considering Jonathan Lear’s interesting interpretation of Aristotle’s metaphysics and theology, and will proceed to show how this interpretation is completed within a Thomistic framework.⁹

THE WORLD AS AN EXPRESSION OF DESIRE FOR GOD

Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics* with a phrase familiar to all of us: “All men by nature desire to know.”¹⁰ It is significant that Aristotle should give as an indication of this desire “the delight we take in our senses,” and above all in the sense of sight, for sight “makes us know and brings to light many differences be-

6. Anton Pegis, “St. Thomas and the *Nicomachean Ethics*: Some Reflections on *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 44, 5,” *Medieval Studies* 25 (1963): 25.

7. Jean Porter, “Desire for God: Ground of the Moral Life in Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 47 (1986): 51.

8. *Ibid.*, 48.

9. I do not intend here to argue as to whether or not Aristotle philosophizes within a creationist perspective, whether or not efficient or exemplary causality may be properly attributed to Aristotle. To this effect, I refer the reader to Mark F. Johnson, “Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?” *The New Scholasticism* 63 (1989): 129–55; Enrique Alarcón, “S. Alberto Magno y la Epístola *Aristotelis De Principio Universi Esse*,” in *Actas del I Congreso Nacional de Filosofía Medieval*, ed. J. Ayala (Zaragoza: Sociedad de Filosofía Medieval, 1992), 181–92; L. A. Kosman, “What Does the Maker Mind Make?” in *Essays on Aristotle’s “De Anima*,” ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amelie Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 343–58.

10. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 1, 980a21–27. Throughout these essays I will be making use of the translation of the *Metaphysics* by W. D. Ross, in *The Works of Aristotle*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), 7.

tween things.”¹¹ The fact that we take delight in our senses is, therefore, a sign that knowledge is pursued for its own sake and not merely as a means to a further end. Man has the capacity to acquire knowledge, and in order to exercise this capacity, the structure of the world cooperates with him. From repeated sensory encounters with items in the world to the knowledge of individuals, which is made possible through the embeddedness, as it were, of the universal in the particular, man is able to formulate more abstract forms of knowledge so that each stage of his cognitive development is grounded in the previous stage. The structure of the world thus helps man to ascend from the cave of ignorance.¹² The world presents itself in such a way that it prompts man to inquiry; the world is therefore meant to be known. As Lear puts it: “If the reality which underlies the appearances did not yield itself to man’s probing inquiries, there would be no basis for thinking the world intelligible. The intelligibility of the world is its ability to be understood.”¹³ The fact that the world gives answers to man’s inquiries indicates that it cooperates with our desire to understand and also manifests the ultimate intelligibility of the world.

Now, it is in the philosopher who understands the principles and causes of the world that the desire to know reaches its fullest satisfaction.¹⁴ Since every man is a philosopher in potency, he is thus in pursuit of more than knowledge; he is in pursuit of understanding. We understand when we grasp the cause or explanation of things. In addition, in understanding the world, man comes to understand himself, what he most fundamentally is, “a systematic understander.”¹⁵ Understanding is thus reflective; according to Lear, “one cannot understand the world unless one understands the place of understanding within it.”¹⁶ Aristotle also thought that the understanding of first principles

11. *Ibid.*

12. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 2–3.

13. *Ibid.*, 117.

14. *Ibid.*, 6.

15. *Ibid.*, 8.

16. *Ibid.*

and causes is divine, for God himself is conceived to be among the causes of all things and a first principle.¹⁷ Thus, in knowing first principles and the causes of things, we arrive at some understanding of God, for whom this knowledge would in effect be self-understanding. As Lear sees it, this likely train of thought has two very noteworthy consequences: "First, since God is a first principle of all things, and is (at least partially) constituted by self-understanding, it would seem that this understanding is itself a cause or principle of all things. Understanding is itself a force in the world. Second, when man acquires this understanding, he is not acquiring understanding of a distinct object which, as it turns out, is divine; the understanding is itself divine."¹⁸ According to Lear, then, the attainment of this understanding enables man to partially transcend his nature.¹⁹ Aristotle himself recognized that life according to mind is divine, and that when man lives in accordance with the best part in him he goes beyond himself and leaves his mortality behind.²⁰ Every man by nature thus has a desire that leads him to transcend his very nature. It is paradoxically in this transcendence of his own nature toward the divine that man most fully realizes himself,²¹ for as Aristotle would say, the best and pleasantest life is the life according to mind since mind more than anything else is man.²²

Given what we have just said, that in understanding the world man comes to understand himself and also that which is divine, let us consider briefly God's relation to the world. Ac-

17. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 2, 982b28–983a11.

18. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 9. What Lear says here almost seems to obliterate the distinction between the human mind and the mind of God. When we are thinking of God, is it the case that our understanding itself is divine understanding? In other words, has our understanding ceased to be the actuality of a potency and become a pure actuality, as God's understanding is? I am indebted to Fr. Stephen Brock for this comment.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7, 1177b26–1178a2. I am using the translation of W. D. Ross, in *The Works of Aristotle*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), 8.

21. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 9–10.

22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7, 1178a2–7.

According to the basic principles of Aristotle's world, Lear would have us suppose that God actively thinks forms or primary substances and that his thinking forms a well-ordered whole, such that God is responsible for the rational order of the world as a whole. Now the order of the world is good and since God is the cause of this order, goodness is found more in him than in the order which is dependent on him. "And all things are ordered together somehow, but not all alike . . . ; and the world is not such that one thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected. For all are ordered together to one end."²³ God is thus the final cause and as such the world tends toward him, desires him. If God thinks the world as a whole, if he thinks the forms that are found embodied in the world, then in Lear's interpretation, "the realization of form in the natural world depends upon the antecedent existence of form at its highest level of actuality. But form or primary substance at its highest-level actuality simply is God. . . . The desire which God inspires is thus *none other than the desire of each organism to realize its form.*"²⁴ By being what it is supposed to be, by actualizing its form, a natural organism can be said to become intelligible and may be conceived "as striving to be understood," for when the form is actively contemplated, it is at its highest level of actuality.²⁵ Since for Aristotle in active thinking there is no difference between mind and object, mind is simply the form it is thinking, or, as Lear describes it, "the form thinking itself," and in general, "a form which has reached the level of actuality where it is mind thinking the form has achieved self-understanding."²⁶ For Lear, then, "All embodied forms are thus potentialities for their own self-understanding. The achieved self-understanding is the form itself in a disembodied state."²⁷ In say-

23. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 10, 1075a11–25. See section 6.7 in Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 293–309.

24. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 295.

25. *Ibid.*, 131.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.* In Aristotle mind in act is identical with its object in act. But mind in

ing therefore that a natural organism is striving to become intelligible, it can also be said that the organism is trying to imitate God's thought, to imitate, in effect, God himself, since God's activity is self-understanding, and although the natural organism cannot obviously alone achieve self-understanding, the human mind enables the natural form, in a sense, to think itself.

Now it is obvious that a natural organism will not be able to imitate God as man does, for man does not merely strive to become intelligible, but he is also intelligent and as such can understand the intelligible order that is present in the world. Man realizes his essence by acting in accordance with his nature, and since by nature man desires to understand, in understanding the world he realizes himself and also comes to understand himself as "a systematic understander" through the very activity of understanding. "And in fulfilling his nature, man comes to imitate God in an altogether deeper sense than is available to other animals. For man is able to engage in the very same activity, contemplating, that is God. In coming to understand the world we become like God, we become God-like."²⁸

If form as it exists in a natural object is form at a lower level of actuality and if, from the perspective of mind, it is merely a potentiality to be understood, then form as it is found in the natural world is somehow dependent on mind. When form is being actively understood, it rises to its highest level of actuality: it is then mind thinking the form, and this is the highest activity of form. The forms found in man's mind are thus at a higher level of actuality than the forms encountered in the world. Mind is therefore "not just a repository of forms, it is the highest expression of the forms themselves."²⁹ If forms attain their highest level of reality when they are being understood, man in

potency and its object in potency are not the same. I thank Fr. Stephen Brock for this observation.

28. *Ibid.*, 298.

29. *Ibid.*, 134.

understanding is in effect reenacting the very activity of God.

Aristotle characterizes God's activity as a "thinking of thinking" and insists that God is Mind that thinks itself.³⁰ Since in Aristotle thinking consists in becoming the object of thought so that mind is thought, or that understanding and the object of understanding are the same, then in active thinking the divine mind and its object are also the same. Unlike man, God does not have to interact with the essences in the world in order to contemplate them and be in his active state. God's mind is not, as man's is, receptive of intelligible forms, nor does God become an active thinker in response to the world. Since subject and object of thought are identical in both God and man, it can be said that God is thinking himself, that his activity is a thinking of thinking rather than a thinking of essences in the world. The divine mind is therefore not dependent on the object of thought, but it is, as we have stated previously, the forms or essences which he thinks that are dependent on his mind. God does not think essences in succession, as man does: one essence and then another; rather, God thinks the essences found in the world as a whole; the order of the whole of nature depends therefore on his thinking. God's contemplation of the world as a whole is, however, "in a strange sense . . . not thinking about the world at all. His thinking is independent of the world; yet it is because of his thinking that the world comes to have the order it has."³¹ And this order is good; as Aristotle puts it: "The good is found both in the order and in the leader, and more in the leader; for he does not depend on the order, the order depends on him."³² The order of the world as a whole is thus a response to God—a response that is none other than the tendency toward or desire for the orderer, as the good of the whole.

And this response can most adequately be brought about by

30. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 9, 1074b15–35.

31. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, 306.

32. *Ibid.*

man who in understanding the world, in penetrating its intelligible structure, and in returning to the very origin of that intelligibility which is God's understanding, is, as it were, seeing things as God sees them, understanding them as God understands them. As Lear explains,

Once we have penetrated deeply into the world's intelligible structure, we come to understand God—or, equivalently, God's understanding. But divine understanding simply *is* the intelligible ground of the world. And so we discover that what we have been thinking (in our investigation of the world) simply *is* Mind. At this point, our thinking is imitating and re-enacting God's thinking. It is in this re-enactment that man comes to understand the world and to understand God, but he also comes to understand himself. For it is only with this re-enactment that man fulfills his highest nature, and thus only then can he come to appreciate the best thing in him: mind, which is divine. It is this form of "self-understanding" that the desire to understand is ultimately, a desire for. Man comes to comprehend fully what is involved in being meant to be a systematic understander of a world that is itself meant to be understood.³³

AQUINAS'S METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE DESIRE FOR GOD

Given this Aristotelian framework and the Thomistic creationist perspective, I wish to advance three theses that can be developed in great part through a close reading of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and which coincide with Aristotelian intellectualism and provide a foundation of the desire for God: First, the work of nature is the work of divine intelligence and is therefore true; second, there is a principle, so to speak, which can grasp the truth of things and nature tends toward the emergence of that principle, namely, the human intellect, because intelligence is at the very core of nature; third, the end of the universe is the

33. *Ibid.*, 317.

truth since its first maker is Intelligence. Let us recall for a moment that in Aristotle Active Mind makes all things intelligible; this “making” of Active Mind can be likened to God’s causal influence on the world. However, Aristotle’s God does not engage in any kind of productive activity; the world is not, so to speak, his artifact.³⁴ And yet, I believe that Aquinas’s explanation of God’s creative activity is reminiscent of the notion of Active Mind as engaging in productive activity and also as analogous to the relationship between art and matter, whereby art is simply the form as it exists in actuality in the craftsman’s soul, which form is responsible for artifacts being the way they are.³⁵

Now, when Aquinas speaks of the different levels of life, he notes that “the highest perfection of life belongs to God, since his understanding is not distinct from his being.”³⁶ Divine understanding knows by no other species than by its own essence. And God’s essence is, as Aquinas writes, “the likeness of all things.”³⁷ For this reason, it may be said that knowing himself, God knows all beings. In addition, if it is the very understanding of God which constitutes his essence, and if this essence contains all perfection, then every perfection found in nature is intelligible because it proceeds from that Being-in-itself which is its own understanding. Every creature has a proper species, a specific nature or essence, according to which it participates to some degree in likeness to the divine essence. And this participation also implies imitation, since the creature tends to be, desires to be, as fully as possible what it is meant to be; its desire to actualize itself can be seen in terms of its desire to conform itself to God’s understanding of it. The essence of created being thus

34. *Ibid.*, 137.

35. I do not mean to suggest here that creation presupposes some sort of matter. Creation is *ex nihilo*, that is, God creates from nothing.

36. *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, c. 11. I am making use of the translation of the English Dominican Fathers: Books I–II (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1923–1924), Books III–IV (London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, 1928–1929). Hereafter cited as SCG. See SCG I, c. 45.

37. SCG I, c. 53.

refers to the divine essence as to its foundation, as the imperfect refers to the perfect.

Without entering into a discussion of Aquinas's comparison of intellectual emanation and divine generation, let us simply say that in understanding himself, the Word of God is in God as God understood, since in every act of understanding there is always given an idea, an interior word.³⁸ Furthermore, this Word is the image of God as to the divine essence, but with respect to the things understood by God (and caused by his understanding), the Word is the exemplar, as the idea or form which exists in the mind of the artist serves as the exemplar for his work. Everything which is has a certain form, and that form pre-exists in its creator. The form which exists in the mind of the creator is the exemplar, and it is precisely through the form of the created being—the form understood as that by which things have being—through which things are made manifest to us and are knowable to us. Since the world is the product of a God who acts by understanding, it is fitting that in the same divine understanding there be given the form to whose likeness the world was created. What is formed thus refers to the Form of forms; the intelligible to the Absolute Intellect. Things are designated true insofar as what they are—their nature—pre-exists in the divine mind; things are made according to the exemplary form that exists in the understanding of God and for this reason are true. “Everything has truth of nature according to the degree in which it imitates the knowledge of God, as the thing made by art agrees with the art.”³⁹ The work of nature is indeed the work of an intellectual substance.⁴⁰ Now in speaking of God as the first exemplary cause of all things, by which

38. See my article “The Divine Ideas and the Intelligibility of Creation,” *Doctor Communis* 44 (1991): 250–65.

39. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 14, a. 12, ad 3. I am citing from the translation of the English Dominicans reproduced in three volumes (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947–1948). Hereafter cited as *ST*.

40. *SCG* III, c. 24.

effects receive a determinate form, Aquinas notes: “This determination of forms must be reduced to the divine wisdom as its first principle, for divine wisdom devised the order of the universe, which order consists in the variety of things.”⁴¹ This wisdom of God is the very divine essence, the Divine Idea or Form, the first exemplary cause.

If intelligence permeates, as it were, the whole of creation, making created being intelligible, true, it is then not strange that the goal of nature should be intelligence. The latter is found from the very beginning as the immanent reason for the dynamism which is manifested in nature. Just as in Aristotelian teleology, in which all terrestrial things are directed to man’s service, in which nature seems meant to make contemplation possible, that is, to make possible the proper function of human intelligence,⁴² so also in the real order of the Thomistic universe everything is disposed for the appearance of man, for the universe would not reach its perfection without intellectual creatures. As matter desires form, so the entire universe on the essential level is ordered to man: the less perfect in nature is ordered to the more perfect, for that which is superior is somehow participated in by the inferior. Nature proceeds from the imperfect to the perfect in a gradual way. Aquinas, like Aristotle, held to the principle of continuity, such that each level of reality cannot be independent of the other; since they all proceed from the same first principle, namely, divine wisdom, they have a certain continuity with one another.⁴³ To this effect, Aquinas says, “Orders of this kind, since they proceed from the one first principle, have a certain continuity with one another in such a way that the order of bodies touches on [*atingit*] the order of souls and the order of souls touches on the order of intellects,

41. *STI*, q. 44, a. 3, resp.

42. Joseph Owens, “Is Nature Something Complete?” in *Toward a Christian Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 81.

43. Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 196.

which touches on the divine order.”⁴⁴ If we consider that matter is ordered to form and that it desires precisely the most noble of forms, namely, that of the human being, it follows that “everything below human being, not only is for human being, to be used by human being, but also preparatory for its exercise of intelligence.”⁴⁵ This ordering of nature to the emergence of man and of human intelligence can be seen not only in the real order through the gradation of forms, but also in the gnoseological order in which a degree of intelligence, of reflexivity, can already be noted in the lower faculties, such as in common sense and in the cogitative sense.

The human soul transcends all other forms in composition with matter; its superiority is based on its intellectual activity whereby it does not communicate with matter, for it is not totally enclosed within matter like other material forms.⁴⁶ The human being’s rational soul has thus the ability to contain or to be in a certain way all things. As Aquinas puts it: “Spirit-endowed beings possess a higher affinity to the whole of reality than other beings. Every spiritual substance namely, in a certain sense, is all in all, insofar as it is able, through its cognitive power to grasp all there is. Any other substance, in contrast, enjoys but an incomplete participation in the realm of being.”⁴⁷ And elsewhere Aquinas says, “The spiritual soul, being able to know the essence of things, possesses a potency unto the infinite.”⁴⁸ Man is thus able to reach the essence of things, and because of this he is empowered to attain the totality of things as well.⁴⁹ Since the human mind possesses the cognitive power to reach universal essences and since these account for the knowabili-

44. *In De Causis*, lect. 19, n. 352, quoted in Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 193. See SCG III, c. 9.

45. Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 257.

46. SCG II, c. 68.

47. SCG III, c. 112.

48. ST I, q. 76, a. 5, obj. 4, ad 4.

49. Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth*, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 89.

ty of things, for their intelligibility, which is in turn grounded in the divine essence, in divine understanding, which is the first exemplary cause and also the final cause, it may be said that in knowing things, the intellectual creature that is man is returning them to Creative Thought. If there is in material beings a kind of imperfection due to the limitation to their own individuality, then this imperfection is, in a sense, compensated for when material things are being known by man, for "all things are somehow in the higher immaterial substances as in universal causes."⁵⁰ The desire for God in nonrational beings is, as it were, brought to completion through man's knowledge of them. According to Aquinas, all things are perfected when they return to their origin, and since the principle of the production of creatures is the intelligence of God, this return to the origin is made possible by means of intellectual substances.⁵¹

It can perhaps be said that the intellectual creature returns all things to their origin when he knows them, because thus there is produced, expressed, in him the form of the divine intelligence. What was intelligible in potency for man becomes intelligible in act as it is for God, when man's intelligence knows things actually. Things, created or made true by the divine intelligence, can thus be known by human intelligence. Upon knowing, man turns to divine intelligence, which is the principle and source of all essences.

In order that the universe reach a more finished perfection, it was fitting that there exist creatures who could return to God not only by a likeness of nature, but also by a likeness of operation. And since what is proper to God is his understanding and his willing, it was fitting that there exist intellectual creatures

50. *In II De Anima*, lect. 5, n. 283. See the English translation of Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's "De Anima"* by Kenelm Foster, O.P., and Sylvester Humphries, O.P., rev. ed. (1951; repr., Notre Dame, Ind.: Dumb Ox Books, 1994); see also Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 270.

51. SCG II, c. 46; cf. SCG II, cc. 23–24. See my article "Activity and Finality in St. Thomas," *Angelicum* 68 (1991): 249.

who would act in the same manner as God with respect to himself.⁵² Man is perfectly likened to God in his action, since not only is it a question of the same type of action but also of the same mode of acting.⁵³ So man, like God, can contain within himself corporeal creatures in an intelligible mode. What is superior contains thus what is inferior, not according to extensive quantity but rather according to intellection, which permits the immaterial possession of the form of another, the immaterial union of one being with another.⁵⁴

It is evident therefore that “the perfection of the universe is actualized in human reason, while reason itself finds its perfection in its knowledge of the universe.”⁵⁵ As Aquinas puts it: “The soul is in a certain sense all in all; for its nature is directed toward universal knowledge. In this manner it is possible for the perfection of the entire world to be present in one single being. Consequently, the highest perfection attainable for the soul would be reached when the soul comprehends the entire order of the universe and its principles, according to the philosophers.”⁵⁶ Now, in Aristotle the understanding of these principles is divine, for God or Divine Mind is a first principle or cause of all things. Following Aristotle, Aquinas notes that since the first maker of the universe is the divine intelligence, the ultimate end of the universe is then the good of the intelligence, which is the truth, and the truth as the origin of all truth.⁵⁷ If man is by nature directed to know the essences of things, and these have their origin in the divine essence, in divine understanding, then man’s yearning to know must be

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 307.

56. *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, resp. This translation of the Latin text differs slightly from the English translation *On Truth*, by Robert W. Mulligan, S.J., et al., 3 vols. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952–1954).

57. SCG I, c. 1. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* II, 1, 993b30–31; *In II Metaphysicorum*, lect. 2, n. 298. I am using John P. Rowan’s translation of Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, rev. ed. (1961; repr., Notre Dame, Ind.: Dumb Ox Books, 1995).

for what is ultimate and perfect.⁵⁸ Since the ultimate intelligible object is God, man naturally desires, as his ultimate end, to know the most perfect intelligible, that is, divine intelligence, the divine essence, exemplar of all that is. “The first truth is the ultimate end. So, the ultimate end of the whole man, and of all his operations and desires, is to know the first truth, which is God.”⁵⁹ In addition, as Lear’s interpretation of Aristotle points out and as may also be seen in Aquinas, in understanding the world man comes to understand himself and this self-understanding helps him to understand by analogy the spiritual nature of God. To this, Aquinas would add that by understanding God, the intelligent creature draws closer to the knowledge of all creatures, since “God understands all things in the act of understanding himself.”⁶⁰ Man thus optimizes himself when he knows the absolute optimum.

Now to ground the desire for God in a metaphysics of the truth of creation is not to guarantee the satisfaction of the desire. While it is true that there is no desire that exists in vain, it is also true that because man is free, he may or may not direct himself to the good of his intellect, namely, the truth. Moral rectitude is necessary for man to reach his contemplative end.⁶¹ But when man’s will is also directed by intelligence, when the will loves in effect the truth, then in each upright action of man, that is, in each action in conformity with the truth, there is concomitantly effected a return to the beginning, that is, to the origin of all truth, to divine intelligence.

58. *ST I-II*, q. 32, a. 2, quoted in Pieper, *Living the Truth*, 84.

59. *SCG III*, c. 25.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Porter, “Desire for God: Ground for the Moral Life in Aquinas,” 56–57.

AQUINAS ON MEASURE

The notion of measure in Aquinas seems to be omnipresent. One has only to consult a Thomistic database to realize the pervasiveness of this concept throughout Aquinas's works; despite this fact, however, relatively few studies of it have appeared in Neoscholastic metaphysics.¹ A discussion of measure is of central importance in Aquinas's metaphysics of infinite and finite being, in the relationship of creatures to God, and in the ordering of all things to their end. The movement of the procession of creatures from God and their reversion to him both involve measure.² The measure theme is thus closely associated with the Neoplatonic doctrine of *circulatio*, according to which every ef-

1. James M. McEvoy, "The Divine as the Measure of Being in Platonic and Scholastic Thought," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Wippel (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 85–116. See also by McEvoy, "Biblical and Platonic Measure in John Scottus Eriugena," in *Eriugena: East and West*, Papers of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame, October 18–20, 1991, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 5 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994): 153–77.

2. For a Neoplatonic discussion of the measure theme, which concentrates on God as the measure of finite beings, as well as the procession of creatures from God and their return to him, Proclus's *Elements of Theology* is an excellent source (e.g., props. 39 and 117). Proclus's views reappear in both the work of Pseudo-Dionysius and in the *Liber de Causis*. See *Theological Elements* in "The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus," trans. Thomas Taylor (London: T. Payne & Son, 1792).

fect turns back by nature to the cause from which it originates, for in its likeness to the source lies the perfection of the effect.³

While at the metaphysical level Aquinas is perhaps especially indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius and to the *Book of Causes* for his development of the measure theme,⁴ in questions of epistemology Aquinas relies heavily on Aristotle. Because of the epistemological relevance of this theme to his metaphysics, in particular to the relationship of creation to the divine intellect, I will first draw attention to Aristotle's importance in Aquinas's thought on measure, and then will proceed to consider the pivotal role given to the measure theme in Thomistic metaphysics. My interest in what measures beings will also extend to what measures them in activity and thus measures the way of their returning to their source. The return of creatures to their origin, their longing for perfection, is made possible by their continual approach, their approximation, to the measure.

In his commentary of Aristotle's remarks on knowledge as the measure of things and as measured by things, Aquinas admits that knowledge is somewhat like measuring, since measure is defined as a principle of knowing, that which makes known the quantity or intensity of a thing. However, Aquinas maintains that it is truer to say that the mind is dependent on the object of knowledge and is thus measured by it, for a thing is measured by that on which it depends.⁵ When we know some-

3. See Jan A. Aertsen, "The Circulation-Motive and Man in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas," in *L'Homme et son univers au moyen âge* (Louvain-la-neuve: Proceedings of the 7th International Congress of Medieval Philosophy, 1986), 1: 432–39. See also M.-D. Chenu, *Introduction à l'étude de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1954), 266ff.

4. Cf. Aquinas's *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 107: "Since *the first being* gives being and infinity to intelligences, it is *the measure of first beings*, namely, of *intelligent things*, and consequently of *second beings*, namely, of *sensible things*, inasmuch as the first in each genus is the measure of that genus insofar as, by approaching it or receding from it, something is known to be more perfect or less perfect in that genus." Chapters 4 and 5 of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names* also deal with the measure theme: God or the Good is for Pseudo-Dionysius the measure of all creatures, but himself is unmeasured.

5. See *In X Metaphysicorum*, lect. 2, nn. 1956–57: "We do not know [objects of

thing we are being measured by the object, since the latter acts as a measuring instrument applied to us from the outside. Just as we apply a ruler to measure the length of a line, so our knowledge is being measured by the object outside us, rather than our measuring the object. The only case in which human knowledge measures things, according to Aquinas, is in artistic creation, where our knowledge serves as the measure of the object produced.⁶ Aquinas seeks to safeguard the objectivity of knowledge by arguing that beings are independent of our knowing them, that our knowing them cannot be their measure in any absolute sense, and that it is the independent beings themselves that determine or measure our knowledge.⁷ We do, however, also consider knowledge not only from the side of the object but also from the side of the subject, for things are known according to the mode of the knower, of the recipient. In knowing, the human soul is passive before the object, for it is not constructing or changing the object. The action of knowing remains within the soul; the receptivity of the soul consists in its passing from first act to second act. The passing of the human soul to the act of knowledge is only made possible through its dependence on the object. The latter is therefore measuring the knowing subject and thus remains unchanged as the soul actively receives it. Once again, the object is the measure of our knowing; our knowledge is not the measure of things.⁸

knowledge] in the same way that we know something by means of a measure. For something is known by a measure as a principle of knowledge; but things are known by sensory perception and by intellectual knowledge as by a cognitive power or cognitive habit. Therefore [the cognitive powers] are called measures figuratively, because in reality they are measured rather than measure." Hereafter cited as *In X Metaph.*

6. *In X Metaph.*, lect. 2, n. 1939: "And if there is a science which is the cause of the thing known, it must be this science which measures that thing, just as the science of the master planner is the measure of things made by art, because anything made by art is complete insofar as it attains a likeness to the art. It is in this way that the science of God is related to all things."

7. *Ibid.* See also *In X Metaph.*, lect. 8, n. 2095.

8. McEvoy, "The Divine as the Measure of Being in Platonic and Scholastic Thought," 108–10.

When we turn, however, from Aquinas's psychology or theory of knowledge to his discussion of the relationship of creatures to God, we find the measure theme developed from Neoplatonic sources. Creatures are related to the divine intellect, to absolute being. Given the simplicity of the divine essence, being and knowing in God are identical, and the beings he creates are known and measured by him. According to Aquinas, "The divine intellect [is, as the first measure,] not measured; a natural thing both measures and is measured; but our intellect is measured, and measures only artifacts, not natural things."⁹ Created realities are therefore placed between the divine intellect, measure of all that is, and the human mind, measured by created beings and ultimately by the divine mind. Aquinas therefore describes the divine understanding as "the measure and cause of every other being and every other intellect."¹⁰ Once established that God is the universal cause of beings, Aquinas concludes that just as the truth of our intellect is according to its conformity with its principle, that is, to the things from which it receives knowledge, that truth of those same things is in turn according to their conformity with their principle which is the divine intellect. The relationship of the human intellect to its objects can then be used as an analogy for considering the relationship of creatures to their cause. The one-sided relationship between the human mind and its objects, whereby those objects are the measure of the mind, without being changed in their being when known, serves as an analogy for the one-sided relationship between the divine intellect, the absolute measure of all created being and intelligibility, and the things to which God has given being. Although the analogy may not be perfect, it does provide us with some metaphysical understanding of the dependence of created beings on the infinite being.

Aquinas explains the relationship between creation and God

9. *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 2, resp.

10. *ST I*, q. 16, a. 5, resp. and ad 2.

as a real relation, since creatures depend on God as the principle of their being, whereas in God the relation to the creature is only a relation of reason. Just as creatures, finite participations in being, cannot modify the infinite being from which they originate, so also the human subject, in being actualized by the objects it knows, cannot modify or structure the objects themselves. The subject-object relationship does therefore provide some understanding of the relationship that holds between finite and infinite being.¹¹

Although Aquinas's development of the measure theme in his metaphysics derives from Neoplatonic sources, there is, however, another idea from Aristotle that has an important place in his metaphysics, namely, that the unit is the true measure in the genus of quantity. This idea will be developed by Aquinas in Neoplatonic fashion: the One is the measure of all that is and is present to each being in an analogous way, as unity is present in each number.¹² In Aquinas's account of the hierarchy of being, God is invoked as the measure of the scale: a created being has its place or grade in the scale as it approaches to God and recedes from potentiality and nonbeing. What is first, simplest, and most perfect in each genus is said to be the measure of everything else in that genus.¹³ As the most perfect and simple being, God is the measure of all substances, as he is also the measure of all accidental being. Just as unity is the measure in numbers, so analogously God is the measure of all things in all genera and not simply the principle or perfection of one given genus.¹⁴ Aquinas insists that God is not a member of any genus: he is not

11. McEvoy, "The Divine as the Measure of Being in Platonic and Scholastic Thought," 110–11.

12. *In I Sententiarum*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3; hereafter cited as *In Sent.* Cf. *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 3, resp. and ad 7. See McEvoy, "The Divine as the Measure of Being," 112–13.

13. *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 4, a. 1, and *In I Sent.*, Prol., q. 2, a. 2, ad 2.

14. *ST I*, q. 11, a. 3, ad 2: "One which is the principle of number is not predicated of God, but only of things which have being in matter. For one the principle of number belongs to the genus of mathematical things, which have being in matter, but are abstracted from matter according to reason. But one which is convertible with being

a measure proportionate to anything; God and creatures are not in the same genus.¹⁵ God is called the measure of all things, insofar as everything has being and according to its being approaches him.¹⁶ All beings other than God that are substances have some sort of composition and therefore recede from the divine simplicity.¹⁷ The mode of being of each creature is a contracted participation in the perfection and being of God. The creature as a finite mode of being is the causal effect of the infinite measure, of what is maximally being. Since the being of creatures is contracted or determined by their essence, creatures exist only by participation, and thus although there is a similarity between God and creatures, there is always an infinite distance between them.¹⁸

What is by participation is caused by what is essentially. Being by essence, Being itself, is the Neoplatonic One from which proceed in an orderly way a multiplicity of beings, each of which takes its place or grade in the scale of being according to its closeness to the Highest Being, the First Cause, which proximity determines the mode of a thing's being. All things oth-

is a metaphysical entity, and does not depend on matter in its being. And although in God there is no privation, still, according to the mode of our apprehension, he is known to us by way only of privation and remotion. Thus there is no reason why a certain kind of privation should not be predicated of God; for instance, that he is incorporeal and infinite. And in the same way it is said of God that he is one." And ST I, q. 11, a. 2, resp.: "One is opposed to many, but in various ways. The one which is the principle of number is opposed to multitude which is number as the measure is to the thing measured. For 'one has the nature of a primary measure, and number is multitude measured by one,' as is clear from the *Metaphysics*. But the one which is convertible with being is opposed to multitude by way of privation; as the undivided is to the thing divided."

15. ST I, q. 13, a. 5, ad 3 and q. 3, a. 6, ad 2. In both texts Aquinas emphasizes that God is not a measure proportioned to the things measured.

16. ST I, q. 3, a. 6, ad 2. See Edward Mahoney, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being According to Some Late-Medieval and Renaissance Philosophers," in *Philosophies of Existence Ancient and Medieval*, ed. P. Morewedge (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 169.

17. *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 1; see Mahoney, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being," 169.

18. *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 16 and a. 11, ad 4; q. 23, a. 7, ad 9. See also Mahoney, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being," 170.

er than the most perfect and simple being are characterized by composition, which accounts for their falling away, as it were, from the divine simplicity, from the One. The composite beings of matter and form, or essence and act of being, are unlike the cause whose essence is one with its being. Created beings therefore have contracted being, imperfect being; what they are is not identical with their being. As a result of this imperfection, there is then a natural desire toward a fuller actuality, a desire for assimilation to the cause from which created beings originate.¹⁹

I will turn now from a discussion of the First Being, the One, and a hierarchy of beings which are by participation and are thus referred to a maximum being as to their measure, to a consideration again of the relation of creatures to the divine intellect. I spoke earlier of the divine understanding as the measure of every other being and of every other intellect. Things are termed true because of their conformity with the divine intellect. And since being and knowing are identical in God, the beings he creates are known by him and are thus true. The being and the truth of creatures are therefore convertible. Just as there is a hierarchy in being, there is also a hierarchy in truth.²⁰ The relation of creatures to the divine intellect can also be understood according to the model of art. Aquinas says, "The emanation of creatures from God is as the coming forth of artifacts from the artificer. Therefore, just as from the art of the artificer the artificial forms flow into matter, so also do all natural forms and virtues flow from the ideas in the divine mind."²¹ These ideas are the exemplars of all things; they are the forms to the likeness of which things are made. The likenesses of things that exist in the divine mind are the measures of the truth of all

19. Mahoney, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being," 170–71. See also my article "Activity and Finality in St. Thomas," *Angelicum* 68 (1991): 231–53.

20. See Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 158–62.

21. *In II Sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 2.

things, since a thing is said to be true insofar as it imitates that upon which it was modeled.²² That things should be made in imitation of a model is intended by the agent. The first efficient cause thus acts by intellect, and is therefore the first exemplary cause of all things.²³ Aquinas insists that for the production of anything, an exemplar is necessary so that the effect may receive a determinate form. An artificer produces a determinate form in matter by reason of an exemplar, which he either beholds externally or which is interiorly conceived in his mind. Since it is clear that things made by nature receive determinate forms, this determination must be, according to Aquinas, attributed to the divine wisdom as to its first principle, for the order in the universe which consists of a variety of things was devised by divine wisdom.²⁴ In the order of being and truth, God as the first efficient and exemplary cause is the maximum, the external measure, according to which creatures participate more or less in being and in truth.

The form of each thing, on the other hand, may be regarded as the intrinsic measure by which God determines how much of being a creature will receive, that is, to what degree the creature will participate in the likeness of God.²⁵ The higher the form, therefore, the more intense will be the act of being it re-

22. See *De Veritate*, q. 4. See also *ST I*, q. 15, a. 2, resp.: "Inasmuch as [God] knows his own essence perfectly, he knows it according to every mode in which it can be known. Now it can be known not only as it is in itself, but as it can be participated in by creatures according to some degree of likeness. But every creature has its own proper species, according to which it participates in some degree in likeness to the divine essence. So far, therefore, as God knows his essence as capable of such imitation by any creature, he knows it as the particular type and idea of that creature: and in like manner as regards other creatures. So it is clear that God understands many particular types of many things, and these are many ideas." Cf. n. 24.

23. See Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 164–65.

24. *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3, resp. Note how these ideas or "master forms contained in the divine intelligence" (sed contra) do not posit multiplicity in God himself: "These ideas, though multiplied by their relations to things, in reality are not other than the divine essence, according as the likeness to that essence can be shared in different ways by different things." See Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 162–70.

25. See Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 172–77.

ceives. "Each form determines the being of a thing by mediating it in a measured/measuring way with the Being itself of God."²⁶ The form is therefore a measure of perfection and a participation in divine likeness; it is thus spoken of as "something divine and desirable."²⁷ So to speak of the forms of things in relation to the ideas or exemplars in the divine mind enables us to understand nature as related to and dependent on divine art. "All natural things were produced by the divine art, and so in a sense are God's works of art."²⁸ They are related to the divine intellect as artifacts to art, and so just as the work of an artisan is said to be true insofar as it achieves the conception in the mind of the artist, so also all natural things are said to be true insofar as they each have their own form, according to which they represent divine art.²⁹

26. Rudi Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 232.

27. Aristotle, *Physics* I, 9, 192a, 16–17. I am citing from the translation of R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, in *The Works of Aristotle*, in Great Books of the Western World, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), 7. In *I Physicorum*, lect. 15, n. 135. I am using the translation of Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, by Richard J. Blackwell et al., rev. ed. (1955; repr., Notre Dame, Ind.: Dumb Ox Books, 1999). Hereafter cited as *In Phys.* Cf. *SCG* III, c. 97. See also my article, "Activity and Finality in St. Thomas," 232.

28. *ST I*, q. 91, a. 3, resp.

29. In *I Perih.*, lect. 3, n. 30. In *Perih.* is the abbreviation for *In Aristotelis Libros Perihermeneias Expositio*, trans. Jean T. Oesterle (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1962). Just as the knowledge of the artisan is the measure of the artifact produced since the artifact is true to the extent that it conforms to human art, so also divine knowledge is the measure of the truth of natural things. God's knowledge is prior to his effects, just as the knowledge of the artisan is prior to his artifacts, and thus both are the measure of their creations. According to Aquinas, "That which is the measure in any given genus is most perfect in that genus. . . . But the divine truth is the measure of all truth. For the truth of our intellect is measured by the thing outside the soul, since our intellect is said to be true because it is in agreement with the thing that it knows. On the other hand, the truth of a thing is measured by the divine intellect, which is the cause of things. . . . In the same way, the truth of artifacts comes from the art of the artificer" (*SCG* I, c. 62). Natural things are thus situated between God's knowledge and our knowledge; by his knowledge God is the cause of natural things from which we receive knowledge. Natural things, which give themselves, as it were, to be known, are prior to our knowledge and measure our knowledge, whereas the knowledge of God is prior to natural things and is their measure. See *ST I*, q. 14, a. 8, ad 3.

Now the measure of natural things, which has also been termed here the exemplary cause, is the fullness of divine perfection.³⁰ The exemplar, which is really identical to the divine essence, is imitated by every creature in its own way. But creatures imitate the divine essence in a deficient way, since each is a finite imitation of the infinite exemplar. Thus, each copy will fall short of the original model. Since no one creature could perfectly represent the fullness of God's perfection, it was necessary that it be represented by a diversity of things in different ways. And since things are differentiated according to the possession of diverse forms from which they receive their species, the diversity of things will then "represent, according to diverse forms the one, simple form of God."³¹ Different grades of being are due to the possession of diverse forms and species. The order of forms, of grades of perfection, is constituted in relation to an Origin that possesses all perfections in unity. The diverse forms, the different grades of perfection, are in a relationship of more or less proximity to the divine exemplar, just as numbers are in relation to unity.³² The more a thing is like the divine essence, the exemplar, the more perfect it is. As things originate from the highest being and first principle, a multiplicity of ordered beings represent what is in God in a unified and simple manner. Aquinas describes the diversity of ordered being to the One in the following way: "All perfections of things descend in a certain manner from the vertex of things, God. . . . And because perfect unity is found in the vertex of things, that is, God, and the more one, the more virtuous and worthy each thing is, the consequence is that the further one

30. Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 215. See *ST I*, q. 47, a. 1, ad 2.

31. *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 1.

32. *SCG III*, c. 97: "Diversity of forms must be according as one is more perfect than another: for which reason Aristotle (*Metaph.* VIII) likens definitions, whereby the natures and forms of things are indicated, to numbers wherein species are diversified by addition or subtraction of unity, thus giving us to understand that diversity of forms requires diverse degrees of perfection."

recedes from the first principle, the greater the diversity and variety found in things.”³³

The One and the Simple thus effects a vertical order or hierarchy of things. Along with the diverse grades of being which the divine art brings forth, there is also metaphysical continuity and connection at all levels of the scale of beings. Since the perfection of the universe cannot simply consist in a mere diversity of beings, the order between diverse things requires a certain continuity. Things that are too unlike one another or too remote from one another do not tend to unite, and thus nature proceeds little by little from things that are lifeless to animal life, in a continuous, upward scale of ascent. In this continuity of nature, what is impressive is the similarity that exists among neighboring kinds of beings: “The degrees of beings are continuous with one another according to some similitude: hence those things that are totally dissimilar follow one another in the order of things through some middle that has similitude with both of the extremes.”³⁴ This continuity is described by Aquinas as a contact among beings, a contact which is brought about through the influence of the First Being on the varying levels of beings.³⁵ The similarities that exist between like kinds of beings are due to the different orders of reality “touching on” one another. This contact allows something to pass from the higher order to the lower order, so that the lower has some part in what is only fully found in the higher. “Saint Thomas sees an indication of this in the fact that some animals, inferior to man, have something akin to reason, and some plants have something akin to a differentiation of sexes. Everything

33. SCG IV, c. 1.

34. In *De Causis*, lect. 31, n. 456, ed. C. Pera (Turin: Marietti, 1955), cited in Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 193. According to Blanchette, similitude is a notion associated with formal causality and is a norm for order. See 191–202, which are on the principle of continuity. I am using Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, the translation of which is given in note 4 above.

35. In *De Causis*, lect. 19, n. 352.

appears as if something rubbed off on the inferior from the superior through this ‘contact.’”³⁶ For Aquinas, then, levels of beings are not independent of one another; they are not merely in sequence to one another, but there is a continuity and community among beings.

God’s wisdom and art are thus responsible for this hierarchical and continuous ordering of beings. Like an artist who arranges the different parts of his work in different ways, God disposes and orders his creatures by putting them on different levels.³⁷ In this way, the diversity of beings, each in its own mode, form, or measure, imitates the divine exemplar and thus participates in the likeness of the divine essence.³⁸ Everything imitates the exemplar, the divine essence, or the first form, the Form of forms.³⁹ The form of things is thus truly “something divine and desirable.”

Now as was said before, natural things are called true because of their conformity with the divine intellect, because they possess a proper form according to which they imitate the divine art. Aquinas tells us that things are more true in the divine ideas, in the exemplary cause or in the Word, than they are

36. Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 194.

37. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 9.

38. In referring to Wisdom 11:21, Aquinas understands measure, when referred to creatures, as their mode of perfection. See *SCG* III, c. 97: “Thus it is said (Prov. 3:19–20): The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth: . . . Again (Wisd. 8:1) it is said, that divine wisdom reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly. And (Wisd. 11:21): Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight, where by measure we are to understand the quantity, mode, or degree of perfection in each thing: by number, the multitude and diversity of species resulting from the various degrees of perfection; and by weight the various inclinations of things to their respective ends and operations, agents and patients, and such accidents as result from diversity of species.” In *ST* II-II, q. 27, a. 6, Aquinas also refers to Augustine who says that “the measure which nature appoints to a thing is its mode.” See also *ST* I, q. 5, a. 5, s.c. and resp., the question is “Whether the essence of goodness consists in mode, species, and order.”

39. See Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, 130: “Since the form, which is the principle of action, is, in [what is complete among us], limited and participated, it cannot act by way of creation or infusion, as does what is totally form, which in itself is totally productive of other things by a participation in itself.”

in themselves. In saying this, Aquinas is referring to the truth of things, for in the Word the truth of things is greater than it is in the things themselves.⁴⁰ In themselves, on the other hand, things that are caused always fall short in their imitation of the cause, for since the form through which a thing has being is received in matter, it is thereby limited and particularized, just as being is limited when it is received in a specific essence. As a result, the caused thing, the copy, desires to return to the model, to the original. The Origin and the End are therefore identical. Creatures endowed with a certain likeness to the divine revert to the cause, so as to be perfectly reabsorbed into their absolute exemplary source.⁴¹ Making use of the Neoplatonic doctrine of *circulatio*, according to which everything that emanates from the One returns to the One, Aquinas writes in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*: “Every effect turns itself back [*convertitur*] to the cause from which it has come, as the Platonists say.”⁴² In their desire for perfection, all things turn back to the universal exemplar, to the One. Elsewhere Aquinas says that an effect reaches perfection when it returns to its origin; circular movement is thus most perfect since a return to the starting point is thereby effected. The return of creatures to their source or first principle is therefore necessary so that the universe attains its final perfection.⁴³

In the return of creatures to their Origin, the measure theme is relevant once again, for what measures things in being will also measure them in activity, in their movement toward actualization and perfection, in the attainment of their end. As we saw above, the universe comprises a scale of perfection, a vertical order or hierarchy of beings, and together with these grades of being, there is also metaphysical continuity. Distinct individ-

40. *ST I*, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3, and *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 6. See also Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 180–82.

41. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 235.

42. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 1, lect. 3, n. 94.

43. *SCG II*, c. 46.

ual beings in the scale are related to each other and thus constitute a unity, an order. Things are ordered to each other: they are prior to or posterior to each other and are also said to be more or less according as they approach the standard, that is, the measure, or recede from it. The standard for this ordered universe is the external measure, the exemplary cause, fullness of perfection, whereas through form, their intrinsic measure, creatures have a mode of perfection. Now this order of creatures in the universe which is due to divine wisdom is only one kind of order, for there is a twofold order which is found in things: the one kind, just mentioned, is that of the parts of a totality among themselves, as the parts of a house, for example, are mutually ordered to each other; the second kind of order is that of things to an end, and this order is of greater importance than the first.

Since order is related to reason, man's reason discovers or beholds the order of things in nature; his reason does not establish this order. Man's reason, however, not only discovers the order in the universe, it also makes a certain order. Human reason in deliberating establishes order in the operations of the will.⁴⁴ And it is this order that will enable man to perfect himself, to unite himself to the Origin, which is his end, and to bring everything else to its end. The perfection of man will thus involve an ordering of the self, such that it will produce a greater unity within man, which will bring about a closer approach to the One.

Now the Origin of the order of caused things, according to the distinction of their natures and levels, has been referred to here as divine wisdom, the exemplary cause, even divine art. The order of the operations of things, whereby they draw nearer to their ultimate end, also proceeds from divine wisdom. God orders the actions of things toward their end by

44. In *I Ethicorum*, lect. 1, nn. 1-2. I am using Aquinas's *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, O.P., rev. ed. (1964; repr., Notre Dame, Ind.: Dumb Ox Books, 1993). Hereafter cited as *In Ethic.*

governing them; he provides governance and regulation for things through the providence of his wisdom.⁴⁵ Divine wisdom is therefore responsible for the gradation among things that are distinct from each other and for the diversity of forms and operations that will lead creatures to their end. While the ordered scale of beings is due to the type of the divine wisdom which Aquinas calls the exemplar or art, the ordination of the operations of things to their ultimate end is due to the type of the divine wisdom named law.⁴⁶

In his treatise on law Aquinas will once again have recourse to measure, since law is referred to as a rule and measure of acts. In the human person law is found in two ways: as in him that rules and measures, for the rule and measure of human acts is reason, that is, the first principle of human acts.⁴⁷ Human reason of itself is not, however, the rule of things, but rather the principles impressed on it by nature are general rules and measures of all things that relate to human conduct, “of which the natural reason is the rule and measure, although it is not the measure of things that are from nature.”⁴⁸ In the order of activity, man’s reason appears therefore to be an intrinsic measure. However, in another way law is in man as in that which is ruled and measured insofar as he participates in the rule or measure. Because all things are subject to divine providence, they are ruled and measured by the eternal law; they participate in the eternal law insofar as from its being imprinted on them they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now since the rational creature participates in divine providence by being provident for itself and for others, it is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way than lower creatures, for man has a share of eternal reason by which he has a natural inclination to his due act and end, and man’s partici-

45. *SCG* III, c. 64.

47. *STI-II*, q. 90, a. 1, resp.

46. See *STI-II*, q. 93, a. 1, resp.

48. *STI-II*, q. 91, a. 3, ad 3.

pation in the eternal law is called the natural law.⁴⁹ So in addition to an intrinsic measure for human conduct, there is also an extrinsic measure: eternal reason or eternal law. In the return of creatures, and more specifically of man, to their Origin which is also their End, there are thus two measures: reason and law, just as there are two measures of creatures in their origination from the cause: form and exemplar.

Aquinas accepts from Neoplatonism the principle that in the conversion of the effect to the cause from which it proceeds, each thing desires its good, and since the good of the effect is derived from its cause, it seeks its cause as its own good; it turns to the cause through desire. What is imperfect desires the perfect.⁵⁰ Man, in particular, therefore, is perfectible. While it is true that things are said to be good in virtue of their form by which they have being, Aquinas holds, along with Plato, that things are said to be good in virtue of the exemplary form of the Good.⁵¹ Everything is good in virtue of its similitude to the Good. In the effect, however, the good is not just something to be but also something to be done. Created beings strive therefore toward complete goodness; the form of a thing, its first act, can be further actualized in the accidental order.⁵² From the form follows an inclination to the operation that is suitable to the thing, and this inclination is the natural appetite to the end. As Aquinas says, “That which is less perfect always exists for the sake of what is more perfect; consequently, as matter exists because of form, so the form which is the first act can be explained by virtue of the operation, which is the second act; and, therefore, the operation is the end of created things.”⁵³

Now in relating the form by which the creature has being to the Form of forms or the exemplary cause, we said that the

49. *ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 2, resp.

50. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 235.

51. Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 340.

52. *Ibid.*, 354.

53. *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, resp.

effect may be considered a copy or image of the model, of the exemplar, and that it represents the exemplar, its measure, to a greater or lesser extent. In the order of created beings, man is more properly image of the exemplar because he is intelligent; nonetheless, man as image will tend to assimilate himself to the cause, to become more like the cause through his operation. Perfection of the image will thus consist in likeness to the cause through activity. Aquinas distinguishes likeness from image in this manner: "Likeness may be considered . . . as signifying the expression and perfection of the image. In this sense Damascene says (*De Fid. Orth.* IV, 12) that 'the image implies an intelligent being, endowed with free choice and self-movement,' whereas . . . likeness is said to belong to the love of virtue, for there is no virtue without love of virtue."⁵⁴ Likeness to the exemplar necessitates therefore virtue, since virtue orders man to the good, to his end; through virtue man orders his life in accordance with reason and thus acts in agreement with his proper form, with what he is, or what might also be called his rank or order in nature. Aquinas insists that "what is against the order of reason is properly against the nature of man as man; what is according to reason is according to the nature of man as man."⁵⁵ The order of reason contains what man ought to do to be morally good; right reason is therefore the standard or measure for moral acts, since it takes into consideration the order or rank or grade in which man is placed in deciding how he should live (what we previously called the intrinsic measure, metaphysically considered). Reason discovers man's relation to God and to other creatures (man's place, as it were, in the scale of being, higher or lower than other beings) and in view of these relations decides what is a good act. Reason then not only knows the order of things in nature, it also makes order in the

54. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 9, resp.

55. *ST I-II*, q. 71, a. 2, resp.

operations of the will and of the sense appetites. Man's will can of course reject the direction, the measure of reason; he cannot, however, totally escape the measure of God.

In order that man perform operations consequent upon form, operations that follow from his rational nature, virtue is necessary. In perfecting man's powers, virtue allows the powers to fulfill their purpose, to perform operations in accordance with rational nature. Aquinas says that the nature of virtue is to order man to the good. Properly speaking, moral virtue is a perfection of the appetitive part of the soul with respect to some specific matter. And reason is the rule or measure of the appetitive movement in regard to appetible objects. Aquinas speaks furthermore of good and evil, of virtue and vice, in terms of how each either conforms to or deviates from the rule of reason:

The good of that which is measured or ruled consists in its conformity with its rule; thus the good of things made by art is that they follow the rule of art. Consequently, in things of this sort evil consists in discordance from their rule or measure. Now this may happen either by their exceeding the measure or by their falling short of it, as is clearly the case in all things ruled or measured. Hence it is evident that the good of moral virtue consists in conformity with the rule of reason. Now it is clear that between excess and deficiency the mean is equality or conformity. Therefore it is evident that moral virtue observes the mean.⁵⁶

The mean can also be described as the good that is measured by reason. Virtue therefore allows the individual man to do just what is right, that is, the mean, what is proportionate to the individual man. Now to say that reason makes order in the will is to say that reason habituates the will to perform actions that are proper to man's place in the universe.⁵⁷ Only by respecting the original order of the universe, the arrangement of the

56. *STI-II*, q. 64, a. 1, resp.

57. Frank Yartz, *Order and Moral Perfection* (Ph.D. diss., St. Louis University, 1968), 105.

diverse levels of beings, and more specifically his own rank or grade within the totality, can man be united to the Origin that is also his End. Man reaches perfection, becomes more like the Exemplar, “by using his reason to put order in his operations so that he will accustom himself to perform acts which will be fitting to the order he has in nature.”⁵⁸ Just as the metaphysical status of things is such that they are in order, so too in the ethical realm there is an order which man makes by disposing himself in a proper way.

For man to perform actions that are in conformity with his rank or grade in the universe, man must dispose himself fittingly. Just as divine art orders the different parts to each other, thus disposing them in a harmonious arrangement, an ordered whole, so man should dispose or order himself for the purpose of being in a harmonious state within himself and in relation to others. Aquinas says, “Mode of action follows on the disposition of the agent. . . . Therefore, since virtue is the principle of some kind of operation, there must preexist in the operator in respect of virtue some corresponding disposition. Now virtue causes an ordered operation. Virtue is [thus] an ordered disposition of the soul, insofar as . . . the powers of the soul are in some way ordered to one another and to that which is outside.”⁵⁹ To be virtuous, then, means that man has properly ordered, related the powers within him, such that reason orders the will and the will can in turn order the lower powers of man. Virtue also allows for maximum performance on the part of the activities of man’s powers, thus bringing the powers and man to perfection. The proper ordering of man’s powers, of his activities, through virtue will also bring about, as Aquinas adds, man’s proper ordering to what is outside; that is, to be virtuous implies good relations with others, just as in the scale of being everything is properly related, fittingly ordered. It is not strange, then, that

58. *Ibid.*, 137.

59. *ST II-II*, q. 55, a. 2, ad 1.

Aquinas, in addition to naming right reason the rule and measure of human acts, should also speak of the virtuous man, of the good man, as the measure in all human affairs.⁶⁰ The more man practices virtue, the more will man approximate the cause; hence the virtuous man becomes a model for others.

Now when man orders his dispositions through virtue, through the rule or measure of reason, he is heeding that appeal in his nature for the order that God places in creatures.⁶¹ There is thus no conflict between the internal measure of reason and the external measure of eternal law or eternal reason. The latter, of which man's nature participates, urges man to live in such a way that his lower potencies are ordered by his higher ones, that his life be ruled and measured, so that he not only perfect his nature but also order himself to God as his end. For in the last analysis, it is the eternal law, eternal reason, that will measure our ultimate perfection, or lack of it; we will either conform to the standard or not. If we are found to be in conformity with the divine measure, then we will have perfected our nature, our truth, eminently found in the divine intellect, and we will thus have reached beatitude and returned to our Origin.⁶²

Finally, the measure theme in Aquinas can, I believe, also be found in another order, that of supernatural virtue, grace, and divine life. That order provides material for the topic of a future essay.

60. *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 4, n. 1803: "Every man in fact does friendly acts for himself insofar as he considers himself virtuous, since virtue and the good man seem to be a standard for everyone. For what is the perfect being in any order of reality must be considered a measure in that order, because all other things are judged more or less perfect according as they approach or recede from what is most perfect. Consequently, since virtue is the proper perfection of man and the virtuous man is perfect in the human species, this should be taken as the measure in all man's affairs." See also *ST I*, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3, and *ST II-II*, q. 60.

61. Yartz, *Order and Moral Perfection*, 128.

62. Man's ordered powers and activities will enable him to perfect the truth of his being. The greater the perfection or goodness of the truth of man's being, the greater will be his happiness.

THE AFFECTIONS AND THE LIFE OF THE MIND

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND THE QUEST FOR AUTONOMY AT THE EXPENSE OF TRUTH

In the opening page of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle tells us that all men by nature desire to know. This desire has been described as the eros toward the first principle or the first cause, an eros which like all natural appetites will require regulation and purification. Without such correction the quest for the truth on the part of reason can be seriously hindered by unruly passion or evil habit, that is, by disordered loves, and also by the influence of the dominant culture in which we live. Our natural desire for truth can therefore be frustrated, along with our flourishing as human beings.

The purpose of this essay will be to consider some of the challenges posed by contemporary culture to an understanding of the life of the mind in terms of a pursuit and love of truth, both in the speculative and practical uses of reason. John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* provides help in delineating what the difficulties may be, by drawing our attention to the materialism, relativism, and nihilism prevalent in our culture today, by contrasting the wisdom of the world to the wisdom of the wise,

which is able to distinguish higher goods from lower goods, and by ultimately focusing on the wisdom of the cross, that radical newness which reason of itself could never fathom. Among the most serious problems of our Western culture are the many forms of atheism and of secular and antihumanisms. Division within the self, for want of a unitary end such as the quest for truth, is common, as is the conflict within human life, either individually or collectively; common also is the struggle between good and evil, light and darkness. A brief analysis of modern and contemporary thought made within the framework of Catholic wisdom, which complements and perfects the truth arrived at through natural reason, readily brings to light man's search for autonomy at the expense of truth, the anxious pursuit of material and external goods, and the absence of what may be called an "ethics of knowing." Such an analysis can also draw our attention to certain fundamental virtues that ought to be fostered in order to counteract the dominant vices in our culture. In contrast to what is problematic and unsound in contemporary culture, we will try to see with the help of that master of thought, Thomas Aquinas, what truths and goods need to be cultivated, and how we might be able to order our loves so as not to impede the life of the mind in its directedness to truth.

At the very root of what hinders knowledge of the truth, *Fides et Ratio* reminds us of the blindness that pride produces: man's inordinate desire for excellence makes him unwilling to submit his mind to God.¹ Man's intellect, created as a potency unto the infinite, is meant to reach beyond the data of the senses to the cause and origin of all perceptible things, and also to appeal to this higher source for the knowledge of good and evil. However, once the mind seeks to declare its independence from God, from the origin of all being, truth, and goodness, the hu-

1. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), sec. 22, par. 3.

man capacity to know the truth is impaired. Referring to the sin of our first parents which so wounded reason, *Fides et Ratio* presents the closing in of the mind and heart onto themselves and thus onto an emptiness or nothingness due to the original *aversio Dei* and the *conversio ad creaturam*. The eyes of the mind were no longer able to see with clarity; reason became more and more imprisoned within itself.² It is no wonder, then, that when limited and fragile reason does catch a glimmer of the greatness to which it is called, there is resistance. Overly concerned about material things and the creation of an earthly paradise, we can drive out the truth amidst these concerns, or we can run from the truth once glimpsed at because we are afraid of its demands. Disproportionate absorption in earthly affairs, so characteristic of modern civilization, and the emphasis on the liberation of man through economic and social emancipation complicate the approach to absolute truth and God, and thus contribute to a critical reaction against the spiritual, or against the Spirit, and to the promotion of atheism.³

Reason is, however, saved from its weakness and imprisonment through the revelation of God himself in history. Faith in Christ who is the very revelation of God's face thus comes to the aid of reason. The truth and wisdom sought by the natural reason of the philosopher, indeed of every human person, find their fullness in that Truth and Wisdom that is Christ. Faith in the revelation of God in Christ transcends human reason but is in fact the satisfaction of reason's desire for truth. And so, all the questions regarding human life find their ultimate answer in Christ; thus, the often quoted lines from Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*: "Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light."⁴ The truth that Christ reveals to

2. Ibid.

3. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1965), sec. 19, pars. 2-3.

4. Ibid., sec. 22, par. 1.

the human person requires, however, more than a theoretical understanding, for the truth that is the Person of Christ wants to enter into a relationship with each human being and for this the human person needs to entrust himself, to give himself, to Christ and to those to whom is given the authority to interpret his message of truth—no easy task in the times of suspicion in which we live, where objective truth and authority are in constant question, and where obedience or submission of the mind and will are ordinarily considered a weakness or defect, not a virtue. The Word of Wisdom that is Christ reveals the mystery of love in and through the Cross. As *Fides et Ratio* states, “The Cross can give to reason the ultimate answer that it seeks.”⁵ Yet, the “scandal” of the Cross, of God’s Wisdom and Love, exceeds human reason, and so man cannot understand how life and love originate from death.⁶

Illumined by faith and set free from the limitations incurred by sin, reason can reach “heights unthinkable to human intelligence,” as in Aquinas’s remarkable harmony between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of reason.⁷ Throughout the course of history, however, as *Fides et Ratio* shows, the harmony of Aquinas’s thought was succeeded by philosophical systems that brought about the separation of faith and reason as early as the fourteenth century with Ockham, but in a more virulent way in modern philosophy. Kant’s essay “What Is Enlightenment?” clearly advocates the unencumbered and free use of reason, the courage to use one’s own understanding as a lone individual, throwing off the shackles of the “guardians of humanity.” Even the clergyman-scholar in the public use of his reason is, according to Kant, free to write and speak contrary to church teaching. Man’s destiny, which consists in the progress of reason, should not be impeded in its advancement by any private commitments to faith and its doctrines, to a communi-

5. *Fides et Ratio*, sec. 23, par. 2.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, sec. 44, par. 3.

ty and its tradition. Reason in its public use should be afforded full freedom and this freedom guaranteed by those in political power.⁸

The problem in Kant of setting conditions for the legitimate use of reason in order to assure the autonomy of reason was eventually to be turned into a critique of power relations in genealogical thought, for the purpose of furthering the growth of our capabilities and the creation of ourselves in freedom. Rather than refer one's conduct to a law or code of rules to which the person would have to submit, Nietzsche wanted to bring into existence a new table of what is good, a law which he would give himself. In both the theoretical and practical uses of reason, whether in Kant or in Nietzsche, what is sought is man's autonomy. Along these same lines, a contemporary Nietzschean, Michel Foucault, poses the very interesting question of the relation between asceticism and truth. Kant's lone individual whose faith commitment has no bearing on the public use of his reason will give way to a nonascetic subject of knowledge.

According to Foucault, modernity is a reaction against Christianity. In his later work on technologies of the self, on the history of how an individual acts upon himself in order to know himself and to live a happy life, Foucault is especially interested in Greek ethics because he sees it as the will to live a beautiful existence. In contrasting Greco-Roman technologies of the self to Christian ascetical practices, Foucault considers that Christian asceticism requires obedience or a renunciation of the self through a renunciation of one's will. The Greek aesthetics of existence is for Foucault replaced in Christianity by a process of purification, that is, a purification of the self that makes possible the contemplation of God. As

8. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" in *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 54–60.

Foucault puts it, "Access to truth cannot be conceived of without purity of soul."⁹ For Christianity, then, there is "no access to truth without ascesis."¹⁰ In Foucault's estimation, however, the modern man will proclaim his autonomy by substituting for asceticism the Cartesian ideal of evidence which states that "to accede to the truth, it suffices that I be; what is needed is any subject which can see what is evident."¹¹ The modern self no longer needs to undergo ascetical practices for the sake of purification, since direct evidence is sufficient for knowing. Foucault thus admits that we can be immoral and know the truth. The modern man will be the man who tries to invent himself so that something radically new emerges from his self-production. The constitution of a new self requires no renunciation of the self, since obedience or renunciation of the will is replaced by the will not to be governed. Aesthetic self-invention thus represents man's autonomy.¹²

It is evident that man's autonomy is bought at an infinitely great price: his independence from the Creator and the denial of his humanity and of his very identity, since there is no stable human nature and no continuous real self. Once the author of nature is forgotten, the human person and human life become unintelligible. In the absence of truth and meaning, everything is ephemeral and provisional. Nihilist thought thus leads not only to a destructive exercise of power but also to "a solitude without hope,"¹³ to "the temptation of despair."¹⁴ And it is this temptation which is certainly one of the greatest threats of our time; indeed, it has become a reality.

9. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self*, ed. Luther H. Martin et al. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 40.

10. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 371.

11. *Ibid.*

12. See my article "Technologies of the Self: Truth, Asceticism, and Autonomy," *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* 6 (Spring 1994): 20–29.

13. *Fides et Ratio*, sec. 90.

14. *Ibid.*, sec. 91, par. 3.

THE SPIRITUAL TORPOR OF OUR AGE: PREVALENT VICES AND REQUISITE VIRTUES

In an article that appeared more than fifteen years ago titled “Redeeming Our Time,” William Bennett described the central problem of American culture in terms of a spiritual crisis, a crisis also very much present in today’s European culture. According to Bennett, “What afflicts us is a corruption of the heart, a turning away of the soul. Our aspirations, our affections, and our desires are turned toward the wrong things. And only when we turn them toward the right things—toward enduring, noble, spiritual things—will things get better.”¹⁵ The anxious concern for material and worldly things has replaced the zeal for spiritual and divine things. When the capacity of the human heart is severed from its true good, then we might say that the capacity atrophies: man finds himself incapable of truly loving. Since man’s heart cannot be satisfied by what is merely material and temporal, a sadness and dejection characterize his existence. Contemporary man in his sorrow has thus given in to the temptation of despair. It seems, then, that despite the economic prosperity, until recently experienced, and the great scientific and technological advancements attained in the last fifty years, and despite the pervasive cult of youthfulness and beauty, man’s life is neither hopeful nor joyous, nor genuinely youthful and beautiful.¹⁶

To better understand what this lack of hope and joy consists in, Aquinas provides us with an interesting discussion on the

15. William J. Bennett, “Redeeming Our Time,” *Imprimis* 24, no. 11 (November 1995), in John Navone, “Spiritual acedia, torpor and depression,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (August–September 1999), available at <http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Homiletic/Aug-Sept99/depression.html>.

16. Cf. Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Sr. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 112: “I believe it is vitally important for an age from whose despair there seems to issue a force and superficial cult of youthfulness to have a glimpse of the highest pinnacle to which the hope-filled youthfulness of those who entrust themselves to God can soar.”

causes of despair, which correspond in great part with Bennett's description of the spiritual torpor of our age. One of the first causes of despair given by Aquinas is lust or a disordered love. If spiritual goods no longer appeal to us, no longer have priority in our lives, it is because our affections have been infected with the love of bodily pleasures and especially of sexual desires. "The love of those pleasures," Aquinas says, "leads man to have a distaste for spiritual things, and not to hope for them as arduous goods."¹⁷ Moreover, bodily pleasures are an obstacle to the use of reason, and as such also hinder the pleasure or joy one takes in the life of the mind, that is, in contemplating or reasoning, first because bodily pleasures distract the attention of reason and may even entirely hinder the use of reason if the bodily pleasure is great; in this sense excessive bodily pleasures may hinder the speculative estimate of reason; secondly, because if the bodily pleasures are in excess, they are contrary to the order of reason; in this case Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that bodily pleasures destroy the estimate of prudence; and thirdly, because bodily pleasure is often followed by a certain alteration in the body, which bodily disturbance either hinders or fetters the use of reason, as may be seen in the case of a drunkard.¹⁸ Aquinas further adds that bodily pleasure implies the repose of the appetite in the object of pleasure, and this repose is at times contrary to reason.¹⁹ And if it is opposed to reason, the repose will be short-lived and an uneasiness or restlessness of the mind will ensue.

It seems particularly relevant to Aquinas's examination of the causes of despair that he should also refer to the "roaming unrest of the spirit" in his discussion on the vice of *curiositas*, which is interpreted as an immoderate striving for both intellectual and sensitive knowledge, or simply as an excessive form

17. *ST* II-II, q. 20, a. 4, resp.

19. *ST* I-II, q. 33, a. 3, ad 1.

18. *ST* I-II, q. 33, a. 3, resp.

of the natural desire to know. The specific type of curiositas to which this restlessness of the mind is attributed is called “sight-seeing,” whereby sensitive knowledge is not directed to what is useful, but rather is an obstacle to useful considerations; sensitive knowledge of this type can thus distract us from speculative knowledge, from the contemplation of wisdom, and render us “foolishly dull.”²⁰ Aquinas describes “sight-seeing” as an intemperate desire to see and quotes from Augustine who puts it in terms of the “concupiscence of the eyes” which renders men curious.²¹

The consequences of this immoderate desire to know have also been seen by the twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger whose treatment of curiosity permits a further elaboration of the Thomistic account. Heidegger begins by noting that in Greek philosophy cognition was conceived in terms of the “desire to see,” and that the priority of seeing was especially noticed by Augustine in his account of *concupiscentia*.²² By means of sight we perceive reality, what is. But concupiscence of the eyes turns us away from the perception of reality and toward a mere enjoyment of seeing. For Heidegger, curiosity does not care to perceive and to understand what is seen, it just concerns itself with seeing. Curiosity seeks what is novel, only to quickly gaze at one novel thing after another. The aim of curiosity, of this kind of seeing, is not the attainment of knowledge, of truth; it strives rather for “possibilities of abandoning itself to the world.”²³

According to Heidegger, curiosity is characterized by three constitutive elements: first, it does not, to use Heidegger’s words, “tarry alongside what is closest. It does not seek the leisure of

20. *ST II-II*, q. 167, a. 2, resp.

21. *ST II-II*, q. 167, a. 2, s.c.

22. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 215.

23. *Ibid.*, 216.

tarrying observantly, but rather seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters.”²⁴ We might say that in not waiting for the reality to disclose itself and its truth, in not making that constant effort to observe and to penetrate what is at hand in order to really know it, curiosity prefers rather to give in to distraction, which is for Heidegger the second constitutive note of the phenomenon of curiosity.²⁵ In living in a state of distraction by new possibilities, curiosity does away with the sense of wonder, with the desire to know which is natural to all men, with the wonder from which all philosophy begins. As Heidegger puts it, “Curiosity has nothing to do with observing entities and marveling at them—*thaumazein*. To be amazed to the point of not understanding is something in which it has no interest. Rather it concerns itself with a kind of knowing, but just in order to have known.”²⁶ By not therefore expecting the disclosure of the truth of what is at hand and by living distractedly among so many new possibilities, curiosity is, according to Heidegger, “everywhere and nowhere.”²⁷ The third essential characteristic of curiosity Heidegger thus calls “never dwelling anywhere.”²⁸ Curiosity’s way of being in the world constantly uproots the person; curiosity becomes then a sign of total rootlessness, which may mean that man loses touch with his inner self or that he flees from himself.²⁹ For Heidegger curiosity gives itself over to idle talk, just as the “wandering of the mind after unlawful things” in Aquinas affects our speech and we become loquacious.³⁰

Heidegger’s contribution to an account of curiosity lies, I believe, in his insistence on its temporal dimension, on its re-

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 216–17.

27. Ibid., 217.

28. Ibid.

29. Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, Lawrence E. Lynch, and Daniel F. Coogan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 201.30. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 4, ad 4.

lation to the temporal condition of human existence. Curiosity does not, as Heidegger says, tarry alongside the present-at-hand in order to understand it; “it seeks to see *only* in order to see and to have seen.”³¹ Curiosity does not hold on to what is present, but in merely making present it constantly runs away from an awaiting, from the futural aspect of what is made present. As Heidegger says, “The present ‘arises or leaps away’ from the awaiting which belongs to it, and it does so in the sense of running away from it. . . . But the making-present which ‘leaps away’ in curiosity is so little devoted to the ‘thing’ it is curious about, that when it obtains sight of anything it already looks to what is coming next.”³² And so, curiosity does not detain itself before what is present, to go deeper into what is at hand and to understand it, but quickly goes on to something else, to something new, and thus is distracted from real knowing. In really knowing things we also know that we know; this is what Aquinas called the reflexive dimension of the truth. But in Heidegger’s account curiosity’s making present is always offering something new, such that this craving for novelty does not let *Dasein* come back to itself,³³ because in not really knowing there can be no return to the self, no knowing that we know. It is not surprising, then, that Heidegger should also characterize curiosity by an increasing forgetfulness.³⁴ The present thing is not held on to, there is no awaiting its disclosure and understanding; there is as it were a flight from understanding the given, the present at hand, only to be in pursuit of something different which once it appears will be left behind and forgotten. There is no doubt that curiosity thus understood kills man’s capacity to perceive reality and to know the truth.

Heidegger’s account of curiosity and of the constant uprootedness of which curiosity is a manifestation makes clear

31. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 397.

33. *Ibid.*, 399.

32. *Ibid.*, 397–98.

34. *Ibid.*, 398–99.

that the natural desire to know requires “an asceticism of cognition,” contrary to what Foucault thought. To counteract the effects of an unbridled form of *curiositas*, Aquinas proposes the virtue of *studiositas* which exercises restraint on the desire to know so that we not seek knowledge immoderately. As a virtue of restraint and moderation, *studiositas* is part of the virtue of temperance which is intimately related to the inner order of the self,³⁵ unlike the uprootedness of the person caused by the curiosity that Heidegger describes. While *studiositas* is directly concerned with the ordered pursuit of knowledge, it is also directed toward the removal of obstacles to knowledge such as the trouble of learning, the bodily resistance encountered in learning which is so often experienced as tiredness. When *studiositas* is exercised so as to remove the obstacles on the part of the person’s bodily nature, Aquinas calls the virtue “a certain keenness of interest in seeking knowledge of things.”³⁶ The more the mind keenly applies itself to something by knowing the thing, the more ordinarily is fostered the desire to learn and to know. The mind’s steady application or attention to knowing grows with practice; the desire to know, ordered by the virtue of *studiositas*, thus overcomes the desire to comfort, or simply laziness. In Heidegger’s treatment of curiosity, on the contrary, there is no keen application of the mind to what is at hand, no patient attention to what is given, and so the desire to know cannot be satisfied. According to Aquinas, as long as we apply ourselves in an ordered or measured way to the knowledge of sensible things, that is, to maintain or sustain our bodies, or for the sake of intellectual knowledge, whether speculative or practical, this attention to the knowledge of sensible things is virtuous. When, however, sensitive knowledge simply stimu-

35. See Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. The section on temperance includes a brief but penetrating account of *studiositas* and *curiositas*, under the heading of “Disciplining the Eyes,” 198–202.

36. *ST II-II*, q. 166, a. 2, ad 3. See also my article, “*Studiositas* and *Curiositas*: Matters for Self-Examination,” *Educational Horizons* 83 (Summer 2005): 272–81.

lates sight and the imagination to no useful end, then it can distract us or distance us from the contemplation of wisdom, that for which the desire to know is meant. We need therefore the virtue of *studiositas* in order to reach our contemplative end; to know the truth, to know the ultimate cause which metaphysics seeks, requires a kind of devotion, that is, a careful and reverent application of the mind to reality. Perhaps the *curiositas* which permeates our age is another sign of the demise of metaphysics in contemporary thought.

Now, there is no doubt that the Augustinian “concupiscence of the eyes” or the Heideggerian curiosity, which is similar to the type of *curiositas* that Aquinas terms “sight-seeing,” contributes in our day to the disordered affection of bodily pleasures. According to Aquinas, “sight-seeing” disposes men to the vices of lust and cruelty on account of the things they see represented.³⁷ In present-day culture our affections are certainly influenced by the images we are given to see.

In an age that has been labeled a “civilization of the image,”³⁸ most of us will agree that there is a proliferation of images of sex and violence, images that do not enable persons to recognize themselves as having a transcendent dimension. At times, the images may have the appearance of the beautiful, but it is a deceptive beauty which simply arouses the desire for possession and closes the person in on himself.³⁹ Furthermore, the constant presence of such images silences the voice of conscience, such that persons are no longer able to detect the divine and moral element in themselves. They thus become forgetful of their true identity: their nobility and dignity as human persons, intimately related to the God from whom they owe their

37. *ST II-II*, q. 167, a. 2, ad 2.

38. See *The “Via Pulchritudinis,”* postplenary document of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in *Culture e Fede* 14, no. 2 (2006): 116–43.

39. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “The Beauty and the Truth of Christ,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 6, 2002, available online at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/Theology/RATZBEAU.HTM>.

existence and to whom they are destined.⁴⁰ As we know, a well-formed conscience makes us see and know the truth in the practical realm; it makes us, as it were, participants in the vision of God, in his knowledge of good and evil. It is no wonder, then, that Nietzsche called for the death of the God who saw all things including man, because as Nietzsche thought, “Man could not tolerate that such a witness should live.”⁴¹ And today we are in effect experiencing the exclusion of God from the public conscience.⁴² With the exclusion of God has also come the debasement of the human person, which has been described in the following manner: “The splendor of being an image of God no longer shines over man, which is what confers on him his dignity and inviolability. . . . He is no more than the image of man.”⁴³ Since it is precisely the fact that man is *imago Dei* which accounts for man’s openness to the true and the good and ultimately to the divine good, which good in particular brings joy and hope to man, it is no doubt the reduction of man to *imago hominis* which has led in great part to the sadness and despair of which we spoke above.

In addition, then, to disordered loves that lead to “a distaste for spiritual things” and to a hopelessness in their regard, and an unbridled form of *curiositas* which uproots the person from his spiritual being and nature, from what he truly is and is called to be, and gives way to a “roaming unrest of the spirit,” so contrary to the joy of knowing that is found in the attentive mind of the virtuous person, Aquinas considers that despair, the causes of which we started to discuss above, is caused in a more special way by sloth, or by what is known as *acedia*. When

40. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 276–80.

41. Michael Schmaus, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. J. Holland Smith (Dublin: Scepter, 1961), 159.

42. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Europe’s Crisis of Culture,” Part 1, July 26, 2005, available online at <http://www.zenit.org/article-13675?1=english>.

43. *Ibid.*

a man considers the object of hope, which is an arduous good, as impossible to obtain either by himself or by the help of another, this way of seeing the difficult good is due to his being overly downcast. Sloth, according to Aquinas, is a state of mind that dominates man's affections such that a man will take himself to be unable to rise to any good. Sloth is thus "a sadness that casts down the spirit."⁴⁴ And despair is born of this sort of sadness. Those who are full of sadness are more prone to despair, whereas those who are joyful have greater hope. The "oppressive sorrow" which is sloth so weighs upon man's mind that Aquinas identifies sloth with a "sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin [the] good."⁴⁵ Spiritual goods, which are both end and means, are the object of the sorrow of sloth. As a result of despair we avoid the end, while we avoid those goods which are means to the end either in matters of difficulty which come under the counsels because of faint-heartedness, or in matters of common righteousness because of indolence with respect to the commandments.⁴⁶ Sloth is not therefore merely sorrow for spiritual goods considered in a general way, but more specifically sorrow for the divine good.⁴⁷ Aquinas distinguishes between the movement of sloth which is at times in sensuality alone, due to the opposition of the flesh to the spirit, and the sloth which reaches man's reason so that it "consents to the dislike, horror, and detestation of the divine good, on account of the flesh utterly prevailing over the spirit."⁴⁸

It is this aversion of the mind, or withdrawal of the mind, from the divine good which is understood as the *tristitia saeculi* or the "sorrow according to the world," a sorrow producing death.⁴⁹ There is no doubt that the gradual elimination of God

44. *ST II-II*, q. 20, a. 4, resp.

45. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 1, resp.

46. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 4, ad 2.

47. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 3, resp.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 3, s.c. See also *ST II-II*, q. 46, a. 1, ad 3, and Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 119.

from both the public and the private spheres in our society at-tests to an age dominated by acedia and by a lack of real hope and joy. The more recourse there is to pleasures of the body and pleasures derived merely from material things because of disordered loves, the less do we find joy in spiritual things, and the less are we able to experience that spiritual joy whereby charity rejoices in the divine good.⁵⁰ Insofar as acedia spurns the divine good, Aquinas judges it to seek undue rest.⁵¹ In fact, he sees it as opposed to the precept of keeping the Sabbath—a precept that implies that our mind is to rest in God—and the aversion of the mind from the divine good is contrary to such rest.⁵² In our culture where the norm seems to be workaholism, the notion of the Sunday rest as an anticipation of our future rest in God and of our glorification or transfiguration has been forgotten for the most part. Called to an incomparable greatness by being made in the image and likeness of God, modern and postmodern man prefers to be less than what he is called to be. He will not accept the spiritual and supernatural goods because they make demands on him and of these he is afraid. Trapped in acedia, man turns away from God and from what God wants him to be.⁵³ And so it is evident that the despair to which acedia gives rise is accompanied by pride.

As we noted briefly above, pride is an obstacle to knowledge of truth, no less than bodily pleasures that are contrary to reason. Pride hinders speculative knowledge by removing its cause, since the man who is proud does not subject his mind to God so that he may receive knowledge from him. Nor does the proud man wish to learn from other men.⁵⁴ In addition, the affective knowledge of truth is also directly hindered by pride because, as Aquinas puts it, “the proud, through delighting in their own ex-

50. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 2, resp.

51. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 4, ad 3.

52. *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 3, ad 1.

53. See Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 118–23.

54. *ST II-II*, q. 162, a. 3, ad 1.

cellence, disdain the excellence of truth.”⁵⁵ The proud man thus loves himself, his own excellence, more than he loves the truth. For although all men essentially love to understand the truth, the truth may become hateful to the proud man who sees it as an obstacle to his own excellence.⁵⁶ The ordering of our loves is thus indispensable for right knowing and right choosing. Aquinas states this with clarity and precision: “When a person is inordinately disposed toward something, the judgment of his intellect in regard to a particular eligible object is impeded as a result of inordinate affection. And thus the fault is not principally in the cognition but in the affection.”⁵⁷ The proud man is unable to delight in knowledge of the truth; he cannot experience the joy of the life of the mind which befits rational nature, since he delights inordinately in his own excellence.

Therefore, since pride hinders the use of reason and the joy of knowing the truth, there is need of a disposition that will not obstruct mind’s directedness to truth, neither his knowledge of truth nor his love of truth. The virtue which is proposed to us by Aquinas is humility, which he describes as a disposition to man’s unimpeded access to spiritual and divine goods, lest man strive for greatness in earthly or material things alone.⁵⁸ Aquinas refers to Augustine who understands humility in terms of poverty of spirit and ascribes humility to the gift of fear whereby God is revered by man. If, according to Aquinas, a man fears God perfectly, then he does not, by pride, seek greatness in himself nor in external goods. “In either case,” continues Aquinas, “this pertains to poverty of spirit, insofar as the latter denotes either the voiding of a puffed up and proud spirit . . . or the renunciation of worldly goods which is done in spirit, that

55. Ibid.

56. *ST II-II*, q. 15, a. 1, ad 3.

57. *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 9. See the English translation *On Evil*, prepared by John A. Oesterle and Jean T. Oesterle (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

58. *ST II-II*, q. 161, a. 5, ad 4.

is, by one's own will, through the instigation of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁹ Consequently, the humble man, the man who fears God, no longer seeks greatness in himself or in material goods, but rather submits all that he is and has to God and thus seeks greatness in God alone. For this reason, the gift of fear of the Lord is a remedy against pride which renders us fools in God's sight and is likewise the beginning and the perfection of wisdom, whereby we love God above all else and want to please him alone.⁶⁰ The fear of which we are speaking here is not a servile fear but rather a filial fear, the fear of a son or daughter who does not want to displease their father through unfitting behavior. Aquinas tells us that fear of the Lord is the principle of the virtue of humility,⁶¹ and so it is not surprising that "where humility is, there also is wisdom"—not the wisdom of the world which produces sorrow and death, but divine wisdom which fills us with joy and peace.⁶² Interestingly, *Fides et Ratio* advises those who seek wisdom to have recourse to the humble maidservant of Nazareth, for just as by her fiat Mary lost nothing of her humanity and freedom, so too when seekers of truth enter into the fullness of Truth by entrusting themselves to the Word of Wisdom, their true self is realized and their freedom found in its plenitude.⁶³

The difficult good of knowing the truth thus requires the cultivation of humility, since it tempers and restrains the mind so that the mind not tend to high things—neither greatness in the self nor in external goods—in an immoderate way.⁶⁴ Aquinas emphasizes that humility restrains the appetite from aiming at great things—for our purposes here aiming at knowledge—against right reason and from confiding in one's powers alone.⁶⁵

59. *ST II-II*, q. 19, a. 12, resp.

60. *ST II-II*, q. 19, a. 10, s.c.

61. *ST II-II*, q. 19, a. 9, ad 4.

62. See *ST II-II*, qq. 45–46, and q. 161; see especially *ST II-II*, q. 45, a. 3, ad 3, and a. 6 of the same question.

63. *Fides et Ratio*, secs. 107–08.

64. *ST II-II*, q. 161, a. 1, resp.

65. *ST II-II*, q. 161, a. 2, s.c. and resp. Regarding pride, Aquinas says, "Pride

Thus, aiming at greater things, at knowledge of the truth, through confidence in the help of others and in the help of God, is not opposed to humility, but rather attests to man's submission to others and to God.⁶⁶ In addition, the pursuit of truth, certainly an arduous good, requires the virtue of magnanimity which strengthens the mind against despair.⁶⁷ Magnanimity urges the mind to the pursuit of great things according to right reason and is about the hope of what is difficult.⁶⁸ Therefore, magnanimity strengthens our hope in that we have that "firmness of mind"⁶⁹ to trust that we will be able to attain the truth which is the good of the intellect. We can no doubt contrast the magnanimity of the humble philosopher to the abdication of truth which characterizes relativist and nihilist philosophers. Just as humility counteracts the pride of the curious man who does not await the understanding of things, the disclosure of their truth, magnanimity does not give way to the troubled mind of the one who despairs. The humble and magnanimous man is characterized by the hope and joy which, as we saw earlier, is so often lacking in contemporary man because he desires and hopes for the wrong things.

TOWARD A SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

As Bennett says, only when our affections and our desires turn toward enduring and noble things will we rise from our cultural crisis. And for this to occur, a spiritual renewal is necessary. While many of our contemporaries in their pursuit of youth and a longer physical life would argue that what needs to be renewed is the body, Aquinas writes in his *Commentary on the*

denotes immoderate desire of one's own excellence, a desire, to wit, that is not in accordance with right reason" (*ST II-II*, q. 162, a. 4, resp.).

66. *ST II-II* q. 161, a. 2, ad 2.

67. *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 1, resp., and a. 2, ad 3.

68. *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 6, resp.

69. *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 5, resp.

Epistle to the Ephesians that “unless the spirit is renewed in this life, the body will never be renewed.”⁷⁰ As the man subjected to sin is termed an old man, Aquinas tells us that “the primary source of newness and renovation is Christ.”⁷¹ So, in order to be renewed in spirit, we have to undergo a *kenosis*, stripping ourselves of the old man with his deeds.⁷² It is evident that this sort of emptying of ourselves is contrary to what the postmodern Foucault proposes: an access to truth without asceticism, without renunciation of the self, and thus without the cultivation of such fundamental virtues as studiositas, humility, and magnanimity. Foucault’s constitution of a new self through aesthetic self-invention is an illusion.

If a renewal of spirit is to take place, if new men are to be formed, we do well to look for examples of men and women whose lives give witness to an ordered pursuit and love of the truth. Here, I think, reference to the life of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain can be instructive. As students at the Sorbonne in Paris they realized that without truth human life has no real meaning. How they came to know and love the truth and how their life became a service to the truth, bringing about a spiritual renewal in others, shows not only the inherent attraction that all men have to the true and the good, but also the importance of friendship. *Fides et Ratio* reminds us that trusting dialogue and sincere friendship sustain reason in its search for truth.⁷³ This is certainly also evident in the life of Edith Stein whose remarkable character enabled her to cultivate friendships and learn from them. Her pursuit of the truth permeated her life, brought unity to it, and gave it that “singleness of purpose” of a “unitary life.”⁷⁴ For Stein conversion to belief in God and more specific-

70. *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb (Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, 1966), 182.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, 180.

73. See *Fides et Ratio*, sec. 33, par. 2.

74. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

ly to Catholicism was not a Kierkegaardian “leap of faith,” but rather the enhancement of her rational powers.⁷⁵ The truths of faith were to inform her philosophical work since as she clearly saw: “If faith makes accessible truths unattainable by any other means, philosophy cannot forego them without renouncing its universal claim to truth.”⁷⁶ Would that Heidegger, Stein’s contemporary, had thought the same. And so in the case of Edith Stein, as in the case of the Maritains, we have an example of faith and reason working together to inform human life. Moreover, Stein’s love of the truth, her love of the fullness of truth in Christ, brought her to sacrifice her very life for the truth. In the lives of both Stein and the Maritains their commitment to the truth led them to exercise their freedom for the truth. Freedom and truth, like faith and reason, are not therefore antagonistic as they are so often portrayed in contemporary culture.

If there is a lack of faith and even atheism in our times, those who profess belief in Christ who is the very fullness of truth need to pause for self-examination. As one of the documents of Vatican II puts it: “To the extent that [believers] neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.”⁷⁷ A brief reflection on the lives of such contemporary figures as Stein and the Maritains leads us to conclude that the engagement of our freedom for the truth, the ordering of our affections through virtue and ultimately through grace, enables us to respond to that call which all Christians receive, namely, to mediate between God and men, and thereby to bring about a spiritual renewal of persons and of the world.

75. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue, 1913–1922* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 143–44.

76. *Ibid.*, 180.

77. *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 19, par. 3.

PART II 

BEAUTY, ORDER, AND TELEOLOGY

The Perfection of Man and the Universe

BEAUTY AND THE PERFECTION
OF BEING

Many metaphors have been used in order to understand God's creative activity: the Leibnizian metaphor of the divine calculator, the functionalist metaphor of a divine automaton, Aquinas's metaphor of the divine artist, to name but a few.¹ The latter metaphor which, in my opinion, is more than a simple comparison is useful for a better understanding of the finality of creation.² According to Aquinas, the end for which the artist produces his forms is none other than beauty; he says, "No one takes pains to make an image or representation except for the sake of the beautiful."³ The divine artist thus creates something which is in itself beautiful and which is, in addition, expressive or representative of the divine artist himself. Now while it is true that beauty was not for Aquinas as important a theme as it was for the Franciscan tradition,⁴ it may nevertheless be said that in his comments

1. Laura Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," *Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 212–13.

2. See Tomás Melendo Granados, "La Expansión perfectiva del ente en el trascendental 'pulchrum,'" *Estudios Filosóficos* 35 (January–April 1986): 103–28.

3. In *De Divinis Nominibus*, c. 4, 273. I am using Vernon J. Bourke's translation of chap. 4, lect. 5–6, of the *Exposition of Dionysius on the Divine Names* found in *The Pocket Aquinas* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960). Hereafter cited as *In De Div. Nom.*

4. I do not wish to enter here into the question of whether or not beauty is a

on beauty, especially as they were influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition, one can find the necessary elements, along with his metaphysics, in order to develop an aesthetics of creation.⁵ The purpose of this essay will be to show how a consideration of the beautiful and its features coincides with a discussion of first and second perfections in Aquinas, how such a consideration of perfection is related to the order of the universe in its static and dynamic dimensions, and how this order is a work of divine wisdom and beauty, requiring in its turn the cooperation of intellectual creatures. We shall see how the provident activity of men contributes to the order and final form of the universe.

THE BEAUTIFUL AND ITS FEATURES:
THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE

Aquinas's most extended discussion on beauty is to be found in his commentary on chapter four of Dionysius's *Divine Names*. God is the superexistent, the supersubstantially beautiful, who in giving being, simultaneously imparts beauty. All things participate in beauty, just as they participate in being. "The beauty of a creature is nothing but the likeness of divine beauty participated in [it]."⁶ Since creatures receive beauty in accordance with their particular nature, they will thus have a particular or limited beauty.⁷

Now in Aquinas's exposition of Dionysius, the beautiful possesses two essential features: harmony, or due proportion, and brilliance, or radiance.⁸ The brightness or radiance of the

separate transcendental as are the true and the good. For this question, see Aertsen, "Beauty in the Middle Ages: A Forgotten Transcendental?" in *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, 335–59.

5. See Henri Pouillon, "La Beauté, propriété transcendente chez les scolastiques (1200–1270)," *Archives d'HDLMA* 21 (1946): 263–329.

6. In *De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, 269.

7. *Ibid.*, 270–71.

8. *Ibid.*, 269–70. In *STI*, q. 39, a. 8, Aquinas gives a third requirement for beauty, that is, *integritas* or *perfectio* (integrity or completeness).

beautiful is to be understood primarily in an ontological way, but also has psychological significance. Beauty is inseparable from actuality; the first sense of actuality for Aquinas is being, since *esse* is the perfection of all perfections, the actuality of all acts. And the actuality of things is in itself luminous, brilliant.⁹ Since the form of a thing is that principle by which a thing has being, each form is also said to be “a participation in the divine brilliance.”¹⁰ Now this brilliance of being and of form has, in addition, importance within a psychological framework, for the beautiful is concerned with the cognitive power. The beautiful is what delights on being seen or understood. Having being, having form, endows a thing with the light and intelligibility necessary for the thing to be cognized. “Created things are [thus] resplendent with an intelligibility that is answered by the participated intellectual power of the created mind.”¹¹ The human mind is a dependent participation of the highest mind, from which originate all intelligible things. Light in Aquinas is associated not only with the ontological constitution of things but also with the intellect. Every created intellectual power and every act of created intellect is said to participate in the divine light. The created intellect is also said to be derived from the first light, to be an irradiation of divine light, and an image or likeness of the first truth.¹² It is evident, then, that a consideration of beauty may lead to a better understanding of how the world is related to mind and mind related to the world.

In addition to the brilliance or light which accompanies the beautiful, Aquinas sets forth a twofold harmony that belongs to beauty.¹³ According to one type of harmony, things are ordered

9. *In De Causis*, prop. 6, n. 168.

10. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, 272.

11. Mark Jordan, “The Evidence of the Transcendentals and the Place of Beauty in Thomas Aquinas,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (December 1989): 402.

12. *Ibid.*, 400.

13. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, 270: “There is a twofold harmony in things. The first is according to the relation of creatures to God. [Dionysius] touches on this when he says that God is the cause of harmony, ‘as calling all things to himself,’ in that he turns

among themselves. The diversity that is found in the world is not a mere multiplicity of things: a variety of beings unrelated to one another. The diversity of things all have being in common, and this being is given with order. The created universe thus contains a diversity and inequality of beings that is ordered according to different grades of perfection. There is a fundamental commonality to all of them that is due to their being, but their being is diversified according to their nature or essence. Diversity is thus achieved according to a gradation that ranges from inanimate bodies to plants and irrational animals, moving upward in an ascending scale to man and intellectual substances. There is, in addition, diversity within each level. Things are diversified; they are more or less perfect, according to their participation in and proximity to divine perfection. As Aquinas puts it, "The closer a thing approaches to the divine resemblance the more perfect it is."¹⁴ God is thus the measure and order of all beings.¹⁵ But in addition to this external measure, beings possess their own internal measure "by which God determines how much of being a creature is to receive, that is, to what degree it should participate in the likeness of God," and this inner measure is form.¹⁶ Because it is from the form that is determinative of nature or essence that a thing has being, and insofar as a thing has being it approaches to a likeness to God,

all toward himself as to an end. . . . For this reason beauty is named *kallos* in Greek, which is derived from the verb 'to call.' The second kind of harmony is present in things by virtue of their ordering among themselves. [Dionysius] touches this point when he adds that God gathers all things to the same in all. And this can be understood according to the Platonic view that the higher things are present to the lower by participation, while the lower things are in the higher by eminence, and thus all things are in all. Finally, from the fact that all things are in all by some order it follows that all things are ordered to the same ultimate thing."

14. *SCG* III, c. 97.

15. McEvoy, "The Divine as the Measure of Being in Platonic and Scholastic Thought," 112: "God is the measure of all things, simply by the fact that a thing approaches the divine nature in the measure that it has being, and creatures imitate or participate in being in different ways and degrees."

16. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 232.

who is being itself, it follows, according to Aquinas, that “form is nothing else than a participation of the divine similitude in things.”¹⁷ Together with Aristotle, Aquinas speaks of form as “something godlike and desirable.”¹⁸ The diversity of forms is given according to greater or lesser degrees of perfection.

The universe thus comprises a scale of perfection, a vertical order or hierarchy of beings; but together with these grades of being, there is also metaphysical continuity, which is a Dionysian principle: at their highest point, beings of an inferior nature resemble and are joined to that which is lowest in the order immediately superior to it.¹⁹ There is thus in the hierarchy of beings a “wondrous connection of things.”²⁰ Aquinas gives many examples of how this connection is made at all levels of the scale of being,²¹ and it is precisely in the unity of man where the continuity and harmony of distinct levels of power and perfection are observed.²² Humans not only have being, but also life and knowledge. Everything proceeds from the unique first principle according to a certain mutual continuity and reciprocal relation: the order of bodies touches that of souls, the latter joins the realm of intellects, and the order of intellects at its most sublime point is united to the divine.²³ The harmonious and proportionate arrangement of different beings, of different parts, thus constitutes a whole, one universe of things, where “higher things contain the lower in an unbreakable or-

17. SCG III, c. 97.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.* Borrowing Dionysius’s words, Aquinas says, “Divine Wisdom has joined together the last things of higher degree to the first things of lower degree.”

20. SCG II, c. 68.

21. *Ibid.* “Some of the lowest of the animal kind scarcely surpass the life of plants, such as oysters which are immovable, have only the sense of touch, and are fixed to the earth like plants. . . . Accordingly we may consider something supreme in the genus of bodies, namely the human body equally attempered, which touches the lowest of the higher genus, namely the human soul and this occupies the last degree in the genus of intellectual substances, as may be seen from its mode of understanding.”

22. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 265–67.

23. *Ibid.*

der,” and where there is an “unfailing succession of things, not in the sense that there are everlasting genera but that without any gap some members follow after others as long as the course of this world lasts.”²⁴ The order of beings and their continuity are thus the features caused by the beautiful, “because they belong to the meaning of harmony which is essential to beauty.”²⁵

Through this kind of harmony which is present in things due to their ordering among themselves and through the hierarchy that creatures form due to their different grades of perfection, we observe a diversity of forms through which, as we said before, each creature has being. What pertains to the nature of each being is its first perfection. The being that comes to be, however, does not have all the perfection that it is meant to have. So, even though the substantial form brings the first perfection, because through it being is given, the being so constituted is ordered to a greater perfection. Here is, in my opinion, where Aquinas’s second meaning of harmony comes in, for all things perfect themselves when they turn toward God as their end. Now in Aquinas’s text concerning the twofold harmony in things, we are told that God as supersubstantial beauty “calls” all things participating in being and in beauty to himself. The supersubstantially beautiful is therefore responded to or desired by what merely has participatory beauty, in order to complete or perfect itself.²⁶ The substantial form, which determines a thing’s nature and also receives being, is moreover a principle of activity through which a being works toward its final perfection. The ontological constitution of a thing is therefore only the first perfection; the being so constituted is ordered to

24. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, 277.

25. *Ibid.*

26. See n. 13 above, and also Alain de Libera, “Albert le Grand et le platonisme. De la doctrine des Idées à la théorie des trois états de l’universel,” in *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 110–11. As Aertsen points out in the chapter of his book already cited (see n. 4), Aquinas’s commentary on chapter four of *De Div. Nom.* emphasizes “the close connection between the good and the beautiful” (343).

greater perfection. As Aquinas puts it, "For the imperfect is always for something more perfect: therefore, just as matter is for form, so also form, which is first act, is for its operation, which is second act; and so operation is the end of a created thing."²⁷ It is therefore through activity that a being perfects itself and thus reaches its final end, God, Beauty itself. The second perfection of a thing is thus grounded in its first act or perfection.

The twofold perfection of the universe of which Aquinas speaks coincides, in my opinion, with the twofold harmony in things, which harmony belongs to the intelligibility of beauty:²⁸ "The first perfection is found when a thing is perfect in its substance; and this perfection is the form of the whole, which arises from the integrity of its parts. The second perfection, however, is the end; but the end is either the action . . . , or it is something arrived at by the action."²⁹ Now this twofold perfection or harmony of which we have just spoken also refers to the order of the universe. This order exists not only in the first perfection of the universe but is ultimately to be consummated by the action of creatures.

In the beginning of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas attributes ordering to divine wisdom; elsewhere in his writings, he speaks of divine art and providence which both belong to knowledge. As Aquinas sees it, a twofold ordering is found in things: first, there is the order according to which things proceed from their principles; and second, there is that order according to which things are directed to an end.³⁰ Now Aquinas says that "the divine disposing" pertains to the first type of order, "for things are said to be disposed inasmuch as they are

27. *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5, resp. See also Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 66.

28. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, 272, Aquinas says that "individual things are beautiful according to a character of their own, that is, in accord with a proper form. . . . Harmony belongs to the intelligibility of beauty."

29. *ST I*, q. 73, a. 1, resp.

30. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 9.

put on different levels by God, who is like an artist arranging the different parts of his work in different ways.”³¹ Providence, on the other hand, implies the second type of order, that is, the ordering which directs things to an end, and as Aquinas notes providence belongs to practical knowledge.³²

The disposition of things in the universe thus pertains to divine art. God brings together diverse beings insofar as they can be adapted to one another in some order; they complement each other insofar as “the higher beings give perfection to the lower and the higher power [*virtus*] is made manifest in the lower.”³³ And there exists a certain proportion in all the parts, that is, a certain harmonious arrangement among the parts which brings them together as a whole. The beauty of the universe is therefore more than that of individuals; it is their community; their being adapted, suited, to one another, helped by one another, and harmoniously arranged.³⁴

In addition, since God acts by intellect, the species of his intellect is reproduced in the creature; however, since God’s intellect understands many things, it is not sufficiently reproduced in one creature only. Therefore, Aquinas concludes that “[God’s intellect] reproduces itself more perfectly if it produces many creatures of all degrees than if it had produced one only.”³⁵ And as we said above, God did not simply create diverse beings but rather a community or order of beings, and this order of the universe constitutes “the ultimate and noblest perfection in things.”³⁶

Supreme perfection should not be wanting to a work made by the supremely good workman. Now the good of order among diverse things is better than any one of those things that are ordered taken by itself: for it is formal in respect to each, as the perfection of the whole

31. *Ibid.*32. *Ibid.*33. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, lect. 6, n. 364.34. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 270.35. *SCG II*, c. 45.36. *Ibid.*

in respect to the parts. Therefore it was unbecoming that the good of order should be wanting to God's work. Yet this good could not be if there were no diversity and inequality of creatures.³⁷

The order that exists among creatures, their diversity and inequality, is therefore not by chance, but a result of God's own intention. If God's work had lacked the good of order, which according to Aquinas would have been "unbecoming," it would then have lacked the radiance of divine light.

ORDINATION OF THE UNIVERSE TO THE END: ROLE OF INTELLECTUAL CREATURES

Even more fundamental than this initial order, however, is the order of things to an end. The notion of order between diverse parts seems static and abstract in comparison to the second type of order, which is dynamic and concrete.³⁸ Aquinas uses Aristotle's analogy of the army to refer to the ordination of all things to their end: "As the Philosopher says in *XI Metaph.*, the order of the parts of an army to one another is in view of the order of the whole army to the general."³⁹ From this analogy we can also say that what is ordered tends to its orderer. Now in referring above to the twofold ordering of the universe, providence was seen to be responsible for the ordination of things to an end. Although Aquinas differentiates between divine art—the disposition and arrangement of diverse things—and providence, he nevertheless attributes both to God's knowledge. In other instances in Aquinas's writings, however, it would seem that divine art and providence are not so much differentiated as they are viewed within the framework of divine knowledge, wisdom, and the Ideas.⁴⁰

37. *Ibid.*

38. Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 13.

39. *In I Ethic.*, lect. 1, n. 1.

40. In fact, in one text he compares the order due to providence to the order

Divine wisdom, the Ideas themselves, are presented as the foundation for the essences or natures of things, for the forms through which creatures receive their being; the Ideas may also be seen as responsible for the ordering of all things to their end. Now the end is achieved through the activities proper to each being, and activities are also ordered or governed, if they are, in effect, to lead to the end. Let us turn to a text where Aquinas sees divine art and governance from the perspective of divine wisdom:

Just as in every artificer there preexists a type of the things that are made by his art, so too in every governor there must preexist the type of the order of those things that are to be done by those who are subject to his government. And just as the type of the things yet to be made by an art is called the art or exemplar of the products of that art, so too the type in him who governs the acts of his subjects, bears the character of a law. . . . Wherefore as the type of the divine wisdom, inasmuch as by it all things are created, has the character of art, exemplar, or idea; so the type of divine wisdom, as moving all things to their end, bears the character of law. Accordingly, the eternal law is nothing else than the type of divine wisdom, as directing all actions and movements.⁴¹

It is evident in this text that the type or idea for things is found in God, that God's intellect or his wisdom is the exemplar of all that is, and that God's wisdom is responsible not only for the determination of all things in being but also for their movement to the end. When God creates something, he conceives of it according to an idea, according to how his essence can be imitated, and orders it to himself. Therefore, the exemplar is not only the measure of a thing in being, but also its measure in activity and thus in its process of finalization or perfecting.

derived from art: "The order established by providence in the things governed, is derived from the order conceived in the mind of the governor: even as the art-form that is produced in matter is derived from that which is in the mind of the craftsman" (SCG III, c. 76). See also SCG III, c. 79: "Now all things are governed by divine wisdom."

41. *ST I-II*, q. 93, a. 1, resp.

The exemplar, as the measure of creatures in activity, “bears the character of law,” as Aquinas says; thus, the law itself is described as a measure: “Law is a rule and measure of acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting; for *lex* (law) is derived from *ligare* (to bind), because it binds one to act.”⁴² According to Aquinas, since law is a rule or measure, it can be in a person in two ways: first, as in him that rules and measures; and second, as in that which is ruled or measured, insofar as a thing partakes of the rule or measure. Now, as all things that are subject to divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law, they partake in a certain way of the eternal law: from the imprint of the law on them, they derive their proper acts and ends. And of all created beings, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a most special way, since it has a share of providence by being provident for itself and also for others. The rational creature thus has a share of the eternal reason, through which it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end, and it is this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature that is called the natural law.⁴³ As Aquinas says, “The light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the divine light.”⁴⁴ We see then that for Aquinas eternal reason penetrates the being of creatures and in particular that of rational creatures, in such a way that it orders creatures to their end and makes man a special participant in eternal reason, so that man, being the rational creature that he is, orders not only himself to the end but also others.

42. *ST I-II*, q. 90, a. 1, resp. Aquinas insists that law pertains to reason: “Now the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts, as is evident from what has been stated above (q. 1, a. 1, ad 3); since it belongs to the reason to direct to the end, which is the first principle in all matters of action, according to the Philosopher (*Phys.* II). Now that which is the principle in any genus, is the rule and measure of that genus: for instance, unity in the genus of numbers, and the first movement in the genus of movements. Consequently, it follows that law is something pertaining to reason.”

43. *ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 2, resp.

44. *Ibid.*

If I have wished, in speaking of order and of providence, to emphasize divine wisdom, eternal reason, the exemplar, it is also because of the close association between wisdom and light. In fact, Aquinas says, "Divine wisdom is called light, because it consists in a pure act of knowledge (for the manifestation of light is its refulgence, which proceeds from it); the Word of divine wisdom is fittingly called the splendor of light."⁴⁵ Now since every agent produces something similar to himself, and God in creating through his divine wisdom makes creatures participants in being, in the intelligibility of being which is also their light, all creatures, then, by virtue of their very being, will be luminous or radiate light. As we indicated earlier, they will all possess that essential feature of beauty which is brilliance or radiance. The beauty of being is thus due to the supreme beauty and to the spiritual clarity of divine reason, whence all being originates. However, since beauty or light belongs to creatures due to their participation in being, due to their substantial form, we can then say that this light in which they participate is only their first perfection. The beauty, the light, in which they are only participants *secundum quid*, needs to be further actualized so that they attain their beauty *simpliciter*.⁴⁶

Now attaining this second perfection will be realized through the beings' proper operations, by means of which they will attain a greater degree of actuality and thus acquire a greater similitude to God who is pure act, Being itself. But in order to attain this second perfection, creatures must act in an orderly way; only such action will assimilate creatures to God, thus making them more like God and returning them to him.

45. SCG IV, c. 12.

46. The distinction made here is also applied to goodness by Aquinas: "Although each [measure] is good inasmuch as it exists, it cannot be called good absolutely if it lacks other things that are required for its goodness: . . . Accordingly it is not the same in every creature, to be and to be good: although each one is good, inasmuch as it exists: whereas in God to be and to be good are simply one and the same" (SCG III, c. 20).

Now if the ultimate end toward which all creatures move is to be like God, and in God there is no distance between his essence and his being, since in him there is an identity of essence and being, then in the creature that falls short of the Creator in not being Being itself but rather in participating in being through its essence, we might say that the creature's essence is in a sense disproportionate to its being, limiting and restricting the expansiveness of the act of being, and that the act of being itself, which is the creature's act of all acts, perfection of all perfections, attempts through the creature's operations to make the essence proportionate to itself. Although it is true that there exists a proportion, a relation of fitness, between a thing's essence and its act of being, which proportion is constitutive of the thing's initial beauty, its first perfection, it is also the case that this initial perfection is ordered to further perfection and thus one might be able to speak of a certain disproportionate proportion between the essence and the act of being of a thing.⁴⁷ The so-called proportioning of the essence to the act of being through the being's proper activities would of course bring about a greater actualization of the being; this process of proportioning would have a harmonizing effect in the being, thus bringing the creature closer to the source of harmony itself. This proportioning or harmonizing process is nothing other than the perfection or completion of the being, whereby it attains its beauty simpliciter.

Now as we said before, every agent makes things similar to himself. All beings are like God insofar as they have being and participate in the perfections associated with and derived from being. As Aquinas sees it: "All creatures are images of the first agent, namely God: since the agent produces its like. Now the perfection of an image consists in representing the original by

47. See the article already cited of Tomás Melendo Granados (note 2 above) and also Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugo Bredin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 84–85.

its likeness thereto: for this is why an image is made. Therefore all things are for the purpose of acquiring a divine similitude, as their last end.”⁴⁸ It is interesting to note here that whereas Aquinas usually attributes the term “image” most properly to the intellectual creature, in the text cited he is attributing the term widely so as to include all creatures. I believe that this is of significance for our topic, since elsewhere Aquinas says that “no one cares to make an image or representation, except for the sake of the beautiful.”⁴⁹ What God creates, therefore, is meant to imitate divine beauty in some way. As Aquinas puts it in commenting on Dionysius’s thought: “It pertains to a perfect agent to act by virtue of love for what it possesses, and for this reason [Dionysius] adds that the beautiful that is God is the efficient, moving, and containing cause, ‘by a love of his own beauty.’ Since he has his own Beauty, he wishes to multiply it as far as possible, that is to say, by means of his likeness.”⁵⁰ All creatures may thus be called images and as such are beautiful in some way.

The divinely beautiful, which is the exemplary cause, is that in accordance with which all things are distinguished. And as Aquinas says, “The perfection of an image consists in representing the original.”⁵¹ Now the original is the exemplar, the measure, that is, the highest, the noblest, term to which each creature should be inclining itself.⁵² The creature is to be reasimilated with its absolute exemplary source; only in converting to its origin, in returning to it, can the creature represent the original. With respect to this return to the origin, Aquinas interestingly notes that an effect is most perfect when it returns to its source, and that of all figures the circle, and of all move-

48. SCG III, c. 19.

50. *Ibid.*

49. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, 273.

51. SCG III, c. 19.

52. SCG III, c. 24: “And since, in every genus, that which is most perfect is the exemplar and measure of all that belongs to that genus, it follows that God, who is most perfect in goodness, and pours forth his goodness most universally, is in his outpouring the exemplar of all things that pour forth goodness.”

ments the circular, are the most perfect, since in them is effected a return to the beginning. For this reason, creatures must return to their principle if the universe of creatures is to attain its ultimate perfection.⁵³ Now, according to Aquinas, "Every creature returns to its principle, insofar as it bears a likeness to its principle, in keeping with its being and nature, wherein it has a certain perfection: even as all effects are most perfect when they are most like their effective cause, as a house when it is most like art, and fire when it is most like its generator."⁵⁴ And since the principle of the production of creatures is God's intellect, it was then necessary for the perfection of the universe that some creatures be intelligent. Moreover, since the being and nature of a thing pertain to its first perfection, so the operation of a thing pertains to its second perfection, which perfection adds to the first. Aquinas thus says, "For the complete perfection of the universe, there should be some creatures which return to God not only in likeness of nature, but also by their operation. And this cannot be save by the act of the intellect and will: since not even God himself has any other operation towards himself than these. Therefore, it was necessary for the greatest perfection of the universe that there should be some intellectual creatures."⁵⁵ The intellectual creature thus returns to God not merely "in the likeness of nature, but also by [its] operation," for men act in the same way as God, that is, by intellect and will.⁵⁶

Now in his creative activity, since he is an agent by intellect, God produces the creature by means of a form, of an intelligible species, in him. The intellectual creature, which is most like God in operation, reproduces the form of the divine intellect according to an intelligible mode of being when it exercises its intellectual power. The creature endowed with intellect thus imitates God in a most adequate way; just as God comprises

53. SCG II, c. 46.

55. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

all creatures in himself, since he comprises all perfection, intellectual creatures imitate this way of containment: “Intellectual creatures were made that comprise and contain the lower, yet according to quantitative extension, but simply by way of intelligibility: since what is understood is in the intelligent subject, and is grasped by his intellectual operation.”⁵⁷

As we have said before, following Aquinas, it belongs to intellect, to wisdom, to order. Therefore, in the return of creatures to their end, the intellectual creature will have an important role to play. Since ordering, directing, creatures to their end belongs, as we noted above, to divine providence, the intellectual creature will be made a special participant in God’s providence. We might say then that for the order of the universe to be preserved and executed, intellectual creatures are necessary. As Aquinas puts it:

Suitable order is a proof of perfect providence, for order is the proper effect of providence. Now suitable order implies that nothing be allowed to be out of order. Consequently, the perfection of divine providence requires that it should reduce the excess of certain things over others, to a suitable order. And this is done by allowing those who have less to benefit from the superabundance of others. Since then the perfection of the universe requires that some share more abundantly in the divine goodness . . . , the perfection of divine providence demands that the execution of the divine government be fulfilled by those things which have the larger share of divine goodness.⁵⁸

Divine providence requires, therefore, that the highest of all creatures, namely, the intellectual, by means of their proper operations, move and rule other creatures, thus returning them to their end. Because the intellectual creature has a greater share of the power of divine providence, it is the executor of divine providence with respect to those creatures who share less so in the

57. *Ibid.*

58. *SCG* III, c. 77.

power of the supreme providence. "While providence requires disposition of order which is effected by the cognitive faculty, and execution which is the work of the operative power, rational creatures have a share of both powers, whereas other creatures have only the latter. Therefore all other creatures are ruled, under divine providence, by rational creatures."⁵⁹ In addition, Aquinas notes that it belongs to intellectual creatures to govern and rule all other creatures, since they alone are able to know the plan or the scheme of the ordering of creatures.⁶⁰ It is therefore the role of the intellectual creature to preserve and execute the order established by divine wisdom, to bring himself and all other creatures to their ultimate perfection, to reunite all things to the exemplary cause, from which all perfection proceeds. Since man knows the order, he can act in an orderly way. On the basis of such action, which demands respect for the order imprinted on his nature and respect for the nature of those things entrusted to his care, he will attain his perfection and bring others to perfection as well. Only thus will they represent the original, the exemplar.

We can thus say that the static order which exists in the universe, that is, that variety or diversity of beings harmoniously arranged according to levels or grades which are continuous one with the other, and which have their source in the exemplary cause, in the unity of Being itself, a Being who is both truth and goodness—that order radiates light and thus beauty. But this order which is beautiful is only the universe's first perfection. The perfection or goodness of the truth of beings will only be accomplished when the static order of coordination, that is, the right arrangement of parts making a systematic whole, a universe, becomes a dynamic order of subordination whereby there is a right arrangement of means to the end, that

59. SCG III, c. 78.

60. *Ibid.*

is, whereby all things return to their initial principle, in this case, to the unity whence the multiplicity or diversity of beings proceeded.⁶¹ This return to the Principle, to Unity, which is the first Being, constitutes the second perfection of beings and their beauty simpliciter. As all things proceed from divine wisdom, the exemplary cause, or the “splendor of light,” and thus share in this light, in this beauty, in returning to their Source they will be further beautified, as their beauty will then consist in the perfection or goodness of their initial intelligibility, of their initial splendor.

PROVIDENCE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

It is evident, then, that the universe is not closed to further perfection and that through his provident activity the intellectual creature can contribute to the ultimate form of the universe. Since form is said to be a participation in the divine brilliance, and thus in divine beauty, the task of intellectual creatures will be to beautify the universe by preserving and promoting the order and distinction in things.

However, since man is free, he may or may not be a good provider. Consequently, one might question how deficiency in human providence will bring about the final formation of the universe. Having created man free, however, God assumes, as it were, the risk of man’s freedom, so that even from deficiency in human providence, he can and does bring about beauty and goodness.⁶² Besides, to exclude from man the possibility of failing from goodness, would be to diminish his perfection; it would in fact be contrary to God’s government if he did not allow man to act in accordance with his nature.⁶³ Aqu-

61. Charles A. Hart, *Thomistic Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 392.

62. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 5, ad 4.

63. SCG III, c. 71.

nas expresses the difference between God's providence and the providence of creatures when he points to the relation between providence and the norm or end of the first provider. Since providence directs things to an end, the norm of providence is the end, and since God who is the first provider is the end of his providence, the norm is found within himself. It is impossible therefore that any failure in the things provided for be due to God; failure can only be due to the things themselves. Aquinas notes, however, that creatures who have been made participants in the providence of God are directed to God as their end and thus are not the ends of their own providence. It is necessary, therefore, that creatures take the rectitude of their own providence from God's norm or law. Any failure in their providence will be due either to the objects of their providence or to the providers themselves.⁶⁴ According to Aquinas, the more a free creature adheres to the norm of the first provider, "the firmer will be the rectitude of his own providence."⁶⁵

Now since the rational creature knows the reason of his action, laws were given by God to man so that he might be directed in his actions. As we pointed out above, a law is a reason or rule of action; since the reason for an individual's action is his end, then the law guides man to his end, "even as the inferior craftsman is guided by the master-craftsman, and the soldier by the commander-in-chief."⁶⁶ And the end that God intends by his law, that is, "the chief intention of the divine law, is to lead men to God."⁶⁷ God's governing providence thus sets before the rational creature a law or a rule to direct him to his end. Since man's end consists in adherence to God, the divine law directs man to union with God. Now man adheres to God by his intellect and his will. Although man's end is a contemplative one, he does not arrive at this end solely by his intellect.

64. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 5, resp.

66. *SCG III*, c. 114.

65. *Ibid.*

67. *SCG III*, c. 115.

As Aquinas puts it, “The adhesion of the intellect is completed by the adhesion of the will, because by his will man, as it were, rests in that which the intellect apprehends.”⁶⁸ Moreover, since the end of the law is to make men good, that is, more like God, “man is said to be good because he has a good will, whereby he brings into account whatever good is in him. Also, a will is good through willing the good, and above all the greatest good, which is the end. Therefore, the more his will wills this good, so much the better is the man.”⁶⁹

In addition, it should be said that the rational creature’s proper activities are not only the apprehension or understanding of the truth by the intellect and the loving of the good by the will, but also the work of justice. In speaking of justice, Aquinas says that justice by its very nature implies “a certain rectitude of order.” Not only does justice imply order in man’s own acts, but it also directs a man’s acts by regulating them in relation to his fellow man or in relation to the common good of society. Moreover, justice implies right order in the interior disposition of a man, insofar as his lower powers are subject to reason and the latter subject to God.⁷⁰ Now since the good of order existing in created things belongs to providence, and since justice, as was noted above, implies a certain rectitude of order, man will exercise providence well (i.e., execute the order established by God, or bring things to their end by governing rightly), if he is just. For this reason, providence is equated with the observance of justice and right order. When men observe the demands of justice they are called good, whereas when they fail in their own providence they are evil. Aquinas graphically describes the difference between men who are good providers and those who are not and how God’s providence is exercised with respect to each:

68. SCG III, c. 116.

70. ST I-II, q. 113, a. 1, resp.

69. Ibid.

For if [men] keep the right order in their own providence, God's providence in their regard will keep an ordering that is congruent with their human dignity; that is, nothing will happen to them that is not for their own good, and everything that happens to them will be to their own advantage. . . . However, if in their own providence men do not keep that order which is congruent with their dignity as rational creatures, but provide after the measure of brute animals, then God's providence will dispose of them according to the order that belongs to brutes, so that their good and evil acts will not be directed to their own profit but to the profit of others. . . . From this it is evident that God's providence governs the good in a higher way than it governs the evil.⁷¹

From what Aquinas says here, it is evident that when man, through the power of his will, subjects his acts to the order of divine providence, he observes due order. However, when he prefers his own will to God's will, "by gratifying it against the divine ordinance," he is being unjust, since he does not acknowledge his relation to the order established by God.⁷² In this way, he makes it necessary that God mete out justice to him, thus setting aright, as it were, the good of order.⁷³ For, as Aquinas puts it, "When the evil leave one order of providence, that is, by not doing the will of God, they fall into another order, an order in which the will of God is done to them."⁷⁴

It is necessary therefore that man be just, for it is precisely justice that rectifies man's will and his deeds. It is justice that enables man to do the good of reason, that is, to do the truth. Consequently, justice is likened to the truth; as Aquinas says,

71. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 7, resp.

72. SCG III, c. 140.

73. "Since then human acts are subject to divine providence, even as natural things are: it follows that whatever evil occurs in human actions must be included in the order of some good. This is most fittingly done in the punishment of sins. For thus things that exceed in due quantity are included in the order of justice, which reduces them to equality. Now, man exceeds the mark of his quantity, when he prefers his own will to God's, by gratifying it against the divine ordinance. And this inequality is removed when against his will, man is compelled to suffer something according to the divine ordinance. Therefore, man's sins need to be punished by God; and for the same reason his good deeds will be rewarded" (SCG III, c. 140).

74. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 7, resp.

“Since the will is the rational appetite, when the rectitude of the reason which is called truth is imprinted on the will on account of its [accord with] the reason, this imprint retains the name of truth; and hence it is that justice . . . sometimes goes by the name of truth.”⁷⁵ Man is therefore just when his will realizes the true good, the good apprehended by the intellect that sees rightly. Of all the moral virtues it is in justice where the use of right reason principally appears; therefore, the undue use of reason appears especially in the vices opposed to justice.⁷⁶ Consequently, when the true human good is perverted, when order in things naturally human is disrupted, injustice reigns.⁷⁷ According to Aristotle, justice is the human good;⁷⁸ and to this may be added: “Justice simply means ‘doing one’s own work’ and ‘fulfilling one’s own task.’”⁷⁹

Such a conception of justice is closely related to the secondary providence which is proper to rational creatures. When man exercises justice, both within himself, by ordering what is lowest in him to what is highest, to reason and to God, and also by ordering his relations with others, his just activity shapes the universe into its final form. When man is just by doing what he can, by fulfilling his own task, then he promotes and cooperates with divine providence. The intrinsic good, the final form or perfection, of the universe is thus brought about by the activity of rational creatures. Aquinas says this of both angels and human beings: “Although the institution of nature, through which corporeal things are inclined to an end, is immediately by God, still their movement and action can be by the mediation of angels, just as the seminal ideas [*rationes seminales*] are in lower nature only from God but are helped along through the providence of the farmer so that they may come forth in

75. *ST II-II*, q. 58, a. 4, s.c.

76. *ST II-II*, q. 55, a. 8.

77. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 68.

78. *In V Ethic.*, lect.15, n. 1077.

79. Plotinus, *Enneads* I, 2, 6, quoted in Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 68.

act.”⁸⁰ Therefore, just as the farmer provides for the sprouting of the field, so are angels responsible for the administration of corporeal creation. Of course, we can imagine the farmer unjust, not doing his work, in the same way that we may know of politicians, physicians, and teachers who do not fulfill their own tasks. This is, however, the risk that God assumes in creating rational creatures; just as there is no necessity in God’s creative activity, neither is there necessity in provident activity.

Thus, even though man can and does bring about disunity, falsehood, and evil when he does not adhere to rectitude of order, it is consoling to think that the form of the universe, its order, its beauty will not be tarnished but heightened, just as a man’s good will not be lessened by the evils in the world, “for his knowledge of the good is increased by comparison with evil, and through suffering evil his desire of doing good is kindled.”⁸¹ God does not therefore entirely exclude evil, since ultimately in the wisdom of divine providence, it too has a role in the beauty of the universe. According to Aquinas, because the good of the whole is of more importance than the good of the part, a prudent governor, such as God is, will overlook a lack of goodness in a part so that an increase of goodness in the whole may be brought about. Therefore, “If evil were taken away from certain parts of the universe, the perfection of the universe would be much diminished; since its beauty results from the ordered unity of good and evil things, seeing that evil arises from the lack of good, and yet certain goods are occasioned from those very evils through the providence of the governor, even as the silent pause gives sweetness to the chant.”⁸² Good and evil, like the lights and shadows of a painting, like the front and back of a tapestry, will therefore contribute to the final form of the universe, to its final beauty.

80. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 8, ad 4. I am using the translation of this text found in Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 316.

81. *SCG III*, c. 71.

82. *Ibid.*

EVIL, ORDER, AND PROVIDENCE

There is no doubt that the problem of evil has been a stumbling block for many in their belief in God, and yet, despite the atrocities recorded of man against man during the past century—one has only to think of the horrors of the Holocaust, the extermination of six million Jews, and the deaths of over ninety million people due to the wars of the twentieth century—John Paul II in 1995 at the United Nations exhorted us to believe that from the destruction and ashes of the twentieth century would come a “new springtime of the human spirit.” And now, well embarked into the new millennium, when wars and injustices of one human being to another are still very much part and parcel of everyday news, one wonders if the words of the late pope are merely an instance of wishful thinking or if, indeed, they do contain truth. The Christian is not exempt from doubts, but in his more lucid moments when he might ponder on the *felix culpa* or on the life and glory that result from death on a cross or on the very paradoxical nature of the Christian life—the one who loses his life will gain it—he will realize that the tears of the twentieth century may in effect contain the seeds for a new flowering of humanity.¹

1. See John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994), sec. 18, pars. 1 and 3. The preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 was

The aim of this essay will be first, to explore briefly the problem of evil in selected texts of Aquinas, along with his treatment of providence, for in a world created by a loving and good God evil will not obviously have the last word. Aquinas's solution to the problem of evil consists in two basic points, namely, that God permits evil and that he orders it to the good.² To the evil which God wills to permit there corresponds a prevailing good: for example, the existence of defectible natures is necessary for the integrity of the universe; God rules things according to their natures, which is a greater good than the elimination of individual defects; and in some cases the good of one thing cannot be achieved without evil occurring to something else. Examples of this abound in Aquinas: without persecution by the unjust there would be no patience of the just. God's goodness and omnipotence can therefore draw good from evil. Aquinas makes it clear that although evil is disorder with respect to its proximate cause, it is reduced to order by the superior cause. Moreover, the evil which God orders to the good is not always ordered to the good of the one in whom the evil occurs, but sometimes to another's good or to the good of the

meant to contribute to the eventual "springtime of the human spirit," provided that there be docility to the workings of the Holy Spirit. The pope notes that the tragic events of the twentieth century "demonstrate most vividly that the world needs purification; it needs to be converted" (par. 1). See also John Paul II's address to the United Nations General Assembly (October 5, 1995), in *Catholic Dossier* 2 (July–August 1996): 38–44: "I come before you as a witness: a witness to human dignity, a witness to hope, a witness to the conviction that the destiny of all nations lies in the hands of a merciful providence. . . . We must not be afraid of the future. We must not be afraid of man. It is no accident that we are here. Each and every human person has been created in the 'image and likeness' of the One who is the origin of all that is. We have within us the capacities for wisdom and virtue. With these gifts, and with the help of God's grace, we can build in the next century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom. We can and must do so! And in doing so, we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit" (44).

2. "Even though evil inasmuch as it issues from its own cause is without order and, for this reason, is defined as a privation of order, there is nothing that keeps a higher cause from ordering it. In this way evil comes under providence" (*De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 3).

whole universe. All evil then contributes in the end to the good of the universe: not of itself, but by reason of the good joined to it. Aquinas even sees a certain beauty in the presence of good and evil in the universe.³

Secondly, in this essay I wish to consider the close link between human suffering and evil: man suffers because of evil, which is a lack or a distortion of the good. One could say that man suffers because of a good in which he does not participate, from which he is excluded or of which he has deprived himself. Although suffering has been explained in terms of punishment for sin, it is also possible to consider the educational and creative value of suffering and to see in it the possibility of reconstructing the good in the subject who suffers, of consolidating the good not only in oneself but also in relation to God and to others. Suffering can therefore serve for conversion, for man's return to God and the return of the entire universe to God. For this part of the essay I intend to draw from some of the writings of John Paul II on suffering, evil, reconciliation, and the renewal of world order.

Let us begin with Aquinas's admission that divine providence does not entirely exclude evil from things. Given the nature and activity of God, Aquinas's discussion of divine providence as governing things and yet not preventing corruption, defects, and evil from being in the world, argues not primarily from the presence of evil, but rather from the existence of goodness, beauty, and order in the world (since evil could not

3. In a number of texts, Aquinas compares God's care of the universe to the prudence of a man who allows a small evil so that a greater good may occur. In *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 4, Aquinas says, "Any prudent man will endure a small evil in order that a great good will not be prevented. Any particular good, moreover, is trifling in comparison with the good of a universal nature. Again, evil cannot be kept from certain things without taking away their nature, which is such that it may or may not fail; and, while this nature may harm something in particular, it nevertheless gives some added beauty to the universe. Consequently, since God is most prudent, his providence does not prevent evil, but allows each thing to act as its nature requires it to act. For, as Dionysius says, the role of providence is to save, not to destroy, nature."

subsist without the good). In creating, God communicates his goodness to things such that there is a diversity of creatures and thus grades of goodness, which are meant to manifest his perfection and glory: some things are better than others and some creatures are found to be more like God than others. According to Aquinas, if the order resulting from the distinction and disparity among things were abolished, then the chief beauty in things would also be eliminated.⁴ God did not simply create diverse beings, but rather a community or order of beings: beings connected or suited to one another, helped by one another, and fittingly disposed or arranged. This order of the universe constitutes “the ultimate and noblest perfection in things.”⁵ Aquinas also adds that the diversity and gradation among beings is a more perfect imitation or reflection of God than if God had created all things of one degree only.⁶

For the perfection of the universe both higher and lower degrees of goodness are thus required: “The higher degree of goodness is that a thing be good and unable to fail from goodness; and the lower degree is of that which can fail from goodness.”⁷ Since it belongs to divine providence to preserve perfection in the things governed, God’s providence does not entirely exclude from things the possibility of failing from goodness, and it is precisely from this possibility that evil occurs, since what can fail, occasionally does fail.⁸ And this deficiency of the good is evil. In addition, God not only preserves perfection in things, he also provides for things according to their degree of perfection. Because creatures receive being, goodness, and all perfections from God according to a certain mode or measure which is their nature, God also governs and provides for crea-

4. SCG III, c. 71.

5. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 270. See also my article, “Beauty and the Perfection of Being,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 71 (1997): 255–68.

6. See SCG II, c. 45.

7. *Ibid.*

8. ST I, q. 48, a. 2, resp.

tures according to their mode or nature. It would be contrary to God's providence and government if creatures were not allowed to act in accordance with their nature. When creatures act in keeping with their form, corruption and evil result in things: one thing may be corruptive of another because of the contrariety and incompatibility which exist in things.⁹ Besides, in intending some good, an evil can sometimes be produced; knowing this, God who is the cause of all goodness, in his providence does not exclude from creatures all intention of particular goods; for if this were the case, much good would be eliminated from the universe. To this effect, Aquinas gives the following example: "If fire were deprived of the intention of producing its like, a consequence of which is this evil, namely, the burning of combustible things, the good consisting in fire being generated and preserved in its species would be done away [with]."¹⁰ In fact, Aquinas argues that many good things would have no place in the universe were it not for evils: "There would be no patience of the righteous, if there were no ill-will of the persecutors; nor would there be any place for vindictive justice, were there no crimes; even in the physical order there would be no generation of one thing, unless there were corruption of another."¹¹ God's omnipotence and his goodness therefore permit evil for a greater good, unlike the particular provider who sees only the part which he cares for and wants perfection for his part to the exclusion of all defects.¹²

9. *SCG* III, c. 71.

10. *Ibid.* See also *ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 2: "Since God, then, provides universally for all being, it belongs to his providence to permit certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered, for if all evil were prevented much good would be absent from the universe. A lion would cease to live if there were no slaying of animals, and there would be no patience of martyrs if there were no tyrannical persecution. Thus Augustine says (*Enchir.* II): 'Almighty God would in no way permit evil to exist in his works, unless he were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil.'"

11. *Ibid.*

12. *ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 2: "A particular provider excludes all defects from what is subject to his care as far as he can, whereas one who provides universally allows some defect to remain, lest the good of the whole should be hindered."

Thus, while there may be a deficiency of the good in a part of the universe, God looks to the good of the whole.¹³ A prudent governor, such as Aquinas shows God to be, will overlook the lack of goodness in a part so as to provide for an increase of goodness in the whole. Thus, if evil were eliminated from certain parts of the universe, the perfection of the universe would be greatly diminished, for, as Aquinas puts it: “[The] beauty [of the universe] results from the ordered unity of good and evil things, seeing that evil arises from the lack of good, and yet certain goods are occasioned from those very evils through the providence of the governor.”¹⁴ It would appear then, as Aquinas argues, that both man’s knowledge and love of the good would be lessened were there no evils in the world. For a man’s knowledge of the good may be increased by comparison with evil, and by the experience of evil he may be motivated to do good, just as the sick appreciate the good of health and are more desirous of its recovery than those who are in possession of it.¹⁵ Thus, from what has been said, the presence of evil in the world should not lead to the denial of God, for without the order of the good, whose cause is God, there would be no evil. To those, therefore, who argue that there is no God because of the obvious evil in the world, Aquinas counters: “If there is evil, there is a God.”¹⁶

Moreover, while it is true that God is the cause of all effects and actions, of being and perfection, and that agents act by the power of God, evil and defect themselves, as well as evil deeds, are not due to God but rather result from the condition of the secondary causes, which are or may be defective. Thus, the motion in the act of limping is caused by the motive power, whereas what is defective in it does not come from the motive power, but from the crookedness of the leg.¹⁷ “And, likewise, whatever

13. *ST I*, q. 48, a. 2, ad 3.

14. *SCG III*, c. 71. See also note 3 above.

15. *SCG III*, c. 71.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.* See also *ST I*, q. 49, a. 2, ad 2.

there is of being and action in a bad action is reduced to God as the cause, whereas whatever defect is in it is not caused by God, but by the deficient secondary cause."¹⁸ From what has been said thus far, it is evident that God's providence of permission, that is, his permission of evil in the things governed by him, is not inconsistent with his goodness: for to completely eliminate evil from things would be tantamount to governing them according to a mode which does not correspond to them and thus would be a greater defect than the particular defects eradicated; also, as was seen above, the exclusion of evil renders impossible much good in the universe. Evil is thus ordained to some good, and the good is, according to Aquinas, rendered more estimable when compared with particular evils.

Now the only real evil, as Aquinas puts it, is the evil of fault, since man's will, whose object is the good, can withdraw itself from the order of the good. Thus, although Aquinas does speak of evil as being twofold: either as a taking away of the form or of any part required for the integrity of a thing, such as blindness, which evil has the nature of pain, or as a withdrawal of a due operation in voluntary beings, which has the nature of fault, since he who has mastery of his acts through his will is responsible for his disordered act of the will, it is clear that the gravity of the evil of fault consists in man's becoming evil, in his frustrating his perfection or actualization, by opposing himself to the uncreated good, that is, by opposing the fulfillment of the divine will and refusing divine love (Man's original refusal of love must then be countered by a show of love).¹⁹ Through fault man becomes, as Aquinas puts it, worthy of punishment, and thus he makes it necessary that the evil of penalty be dealt out to him, since the order of justice belongs to the order of the good, to the order of the universe.²⁰ Men who do not respect the order of their nature, who act in discordance

18. *STI*, q. 49, a. 2, ad 2.

19. *STI*, q. 48, a. 6, resp.

20. *STI*, q. 49, a. 2, resp.

with their dignity as rational creatures, will suffer the evil of punishment. Aquinas tells us that if men act contrary to their rank in nature, that is, as brute animals, then God will provide for them according to the order that belongs to brutes, for God extends his providence over the good in a certain more excellent way than over the wicked. Consequently, Aquinas says that “when the [wicked] leave one order of providence, that is, by not doing the will of God, they fall into another order, an order in which the will of God is done to them.”²¹ Man’s rebellion from God’s will, through the evil of fault or sin, thus incurs God’s just punishment.

However, while we generally accept the fittingness of punishment for sin, it becomes more difficult to accept why those who do not sin, those whom we call just, are punished as it were or subjected to trials. In giving reasons for the tribulations of the just or the innocent Aquinas says that the evil befalling the just can be or will be ordered to their good: “Justice or mercy appear in the punishment of the just in this world, since by afflictions lesser faults are cleansed in them, and they are the more raised up from earthly affections to God. As to this Gregory says: ‘The evils that press on us in this world force us to go to God.’”²² It would seem then that the evils afflicting the just serve not only to purify them but to attach them, to convert them, to the One who alone is good. Through suffering, through the endurance of trials, the just are, so to speak, spiritualized (to live spiritually is to remain in communion with God); they are able to recognize and contrast the value of material goods such as health, riches, physical beauty, honor, with the One True Good.

21. *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 7, resp. See also *ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 4.

22. *ST I*, q. 21, a. 4, ad 3. Aquinas also speaks of the “excellent” way in which God provides for the just in *ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 4: “God . . . extends his providence over the just in a certain more excellent way than over the wicked, since he prevents anything happening which would impede their final salvation. For to them that love God, all things work together unto good (Rom. 8:28).”

Given what we have said regarding evil and providence in Aquinas, I wish to turn now to a brief consideration of evil and suffering in a few of the writings of John Paul II. Conversant as he was with Thomistic thought, the late pope's analysis of the evil of fault is reminiscent of Aquinas. For both of them evil of fault is contrary to man's dignity, to his order or rank in the universe, and constitutes a refusal to submit to order and to God's will. In his encyclical letter *Reconciliation and Penance*, John Paul II describes sin as being disruptive of the original order of good which God meant there to be; sin wounds man in himself by severing or weakening his relationship to God and to his fellowmen. In speaking of the *mysterium iniquitatis*, mystery of sin or evil, the pope cites as prime examples the first sin in Eden and the story of Babel, and says that by sinning the creature not only disobeys God but implicitly rejects the one who gives him being and conserves him in life. In addition, "[Man's] internal balance is also destroyed and it is precisely within himself that contradictions and conflicts arise. Wounded in this way, man almost inevitably causes damage to the fabric of his relationship with others and with the created world."²³

The rupture of man's relationship with God is poignantly recounted in the parable of the prodigal son, which is given a prominent place in the encyclical *The Mercy of God*; there this severed relationship gives rise to the drama of man's lost dignity, his dignity not only as a rational being, but more importantly, his dignity as a son. After the prodigal son has squandered his inheritance, he suffers from hunger and the loss of material goods; he suffers due to a good from which he has deprived himself. He measures himself against the hired men in his father's house who have bread in abundance, whereas he is dying of hunger. Hidden in his reference to the loss of material goods is the drama of his lost dignity, the consciousness of being re-

23. *Reconciliation and Penance* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1984), sec. 15, par. 4. Hereafter cited as *RP*.

sponsible for his lost filiation. Thus, when he decides to return to the father's house, he knows that his sin has made him unworthy of being called a son, and so wants nothing more than to occupy the place of a hired man. Through his situation and because of sin, the prodigal son has been able to mature and to realize the meaning of his lost dignity. The suffering that he undergoes effects an internal change in him. In wishing to be treated as no more than a hired man in his own father's house, he accepts the humiliation and shame which the rejection of his father and of his place rightfully deserves. Such reasoning on the part of the prodigal son demonstrates that he has finally become aware of that dignity which he lost in severing his relationship to the father.²⁴ And so the recognition of that relationship and of his worth due to his relational being allows for the return to the truth of himself, a being known and loved for himself. He has finally been able to grasp the meaning and value of spiritual goods over material goods; the evil which he has experienced has thus brought him to the recognition of the true good.

It is evident here that the mystery of sin does not have the last word. As John Paul II puts it:

In [the economy of salvation] sin is not the main principle, still less the victor. Sin fights against another active principle which—to use a beautiful and evocative expression of St. Paul—we can call the *mysterium* or *sacramentum pietatis*. Man's sin would be the winner and in the end destructive, God's salvific plan would remain incomplete or even totally defeated, if this *mysterium pietatis* were not made part of the dynamism of history in order to conquer man's sin.²⁵

Without entering into a full explanation of what is meant by the *mysterium pietatis* which makes reference to the mystery of Christ, let us say briefly that the iniquity of sin, man's rebel-

24. *The Mercy of God (Dives in Misericordia)* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1980), sec. 5, pars. 4–5. Hereafter cited as *DM*.

25. *RP*, sec. 19, par. 1.

lion from God's will, is countered by the mystery of Christ's passion and death, by his loving submission to the Father's will, and by his resurrection and glorification. The *mysterium pietatis* revealed in the excellence of Christ's submission to the Father makes possible the reconciliation of man with God. The mercy and love of God, as well as his omnipotence, become manifest in the mystery or sacrament of *pietas*. John Paul II says, "[The] mystery of God's infinite loving kindness toward us is capable of penetrating to the hidden roots of our iniquity, in order to evoke in the soul a moment of conversion, in order to redeem it and set it on course toward reconciliation."²⁶ The task of reconciliation brings about man's internal harmony and also harmonizes man with God and neighbor and with the whole of creation.²⁷

The mystery of divine love, revealed in the person and redemptive mission of Christ, as well as in the creation and sanctification of man in the Father's Son, attests to the overabundance of goodness bestowed upon man; God always gives more than is due to us. The parable of the prodigal son exemplifies the mercy and love of God through the figure of the father. The faithfulness of the father to his paternity, to the love for his son, is totally centered on the humanity of his lost son, on the son's dignity. Upon his return to the father, the son who is the object of the father's love and mercy does not feel humiliated and ashamed—even though he recognizes that he deserves this—but rather as the recipient of the father's loving kindness he is "found again" and "restored to value," since the father's sole concern is that the good of his son's humanity be saved.²⁸ The suffering which the prodigal son experiences prior to his return to the paternal home—a suffering which is both physical and moral, the privation of both material and spiritual goods—opens the way to the grace which transforms his soul and serves

26. *RP*, sec. 20, par. 3.

27. *RP*, sec. 8, par. 5.

28. *DM*, sec. 6, par. 3.

for his conversion. The suffering which he undergoes is transformative: it is a call to virtue, to hope, and to trust in someone other than himself; it is a call to an interior maturity, to a recreation of the self, and to a reconstruction of the good within himself.²⁹ The prodigal son's recognition of his lost dignity, of his filiation, and of the father's loving kindness, which calls out to him even in his misery away from home, make possible the son's return to the paternal house. The good has thus triumphed over evil, and we might say that the painful experience of his alienation from the true good enables him in a sense to become worthy once again of the paternal home, of being welcomed into it. Interestingly, when John Paul II writes on the Christian meaning of suffering he makes it clear that through suffering we make ourselves "worthy of the kingdom of God."³⁰ Although the objective redemption was accomplished once and for all through Christ's passion and death, the subjective redemption will continue until the end of time: each one of us, through physical and moral suffering have the opportunity to prepare ourselves, to mature, and thus to become worthy of the kingdom and of glorification. In suffering, contrary to what many think, God's providence is manifest, for he is calling us to the higher goods, to the One who alone is good, to that which will truly make us happy.

But not only can suffering and evil effect an interior transformation in the one who experiences it, by making the person aware of his spiritual worth and of God's merciful love; there is also an interpersonal dimension of suffering: the one who suffers should be assisted by others; suffering should evoke in those

29. *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering (Salvifici Doloris)* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1984), sec. 12, pars. 3–4. Hereafter cited as *SD*.

30. *SD*, sec. 21, par. 2. See also sec. 22, par. 1, where John Paul II says, "To the prospect of the kingdom of God is linked hope in that glory which has its beginning in the cross of Christ. The resurrection revealed this glory—eschatological glory—which in the cross of Christ was completely obscured by the immensity of suffering. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ are also called, through their own sufferings, to share *in glory*."

who observe it compassion and an effective desire to help. In his reflections on the parable of the Good Samaritan, John Paul II says,

Suffering, which is present under so many different forms in our human world, is also present in order to *unleash love in the human person*, that unselfish gift of one's "I" on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish love which stirs in his heart and actions. The person who is a "neighbor" cannot indifferently pass by the suffering of another: this in the name of fundamental human solidarity, still more in the name of love of neighbor.³¹

So human suffering can give rise to both individual and institutional forms of activity to relieve suffering, to do good to those who suffer. Through the sufferings of others, God makes us participants in a special way of his providence, so as to provide for others, help them, love them, and so cause goodness, as God himself does.³² Again, John Paul II says, "Suffering is present in the world to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbor, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a 'civilization of love.'"³³

Certainly, the past century experienced suffering and evil as perhaps never before; but now, past the first decade of the twenty-first century, it is possible that we are at the threshold of a new civilization where each person, through an interior conversion such as that of the prodigal son, can help to bring about a civilization of interconnected persons, who are a moral support for one another, who reflect the understanding and love

31. *SD*, sec. 29, par. 1.

32. Aquinas also refers to the participation of God's providence in creatures and to this participation as another manifestation of his goodness: "There are certain intermediaries of God's providence, for he governs things inferior by superior, not on account of any defect in his power, but by reason of the abundance of his goodness, so that the dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures" (*ST I*, q. 22, a. 3, resp.).

33. *SD*, sec. 30, par. 3.

of the supreme communion of persons that exists in God, and who thereby correspond to God's creative and salvific love.³⁴ Just as the physical and moral suffering of the prodigal son was a call to hope and trust, to a reconstruction of the good within himself, so also the sorrows of the twentieth century may be a call to the construction of a new moral order. The "new spring-time of the human spirit," of which John Paul II speaks, will be possible if we never forget man's dignity, his transcendent dimension and aspiration to the true good, and the merciful providence which ultimately governs man's destiny.³⁵ The re-creation of our present civilization into a "civilization of love" may seem a utopian dream, so I end with the words of T. S. Eliot: "For us there is only the trying, the rest is not our business."³⁶

34. Perhaps we are now at a moment in history, in which the conversion of individual persons will bring about a reconstruction of social and political structures for the transformation of civilization into a "civilization of love." It may also be the moment of which St. Paul speaks in Rom. 8:19–20: "For the eager longing of creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God."

35. In his address to the U.N. General Assembly in October of 1995 (see note 1), John Paul II says that in order to ensure "a new flourishing of the human spirit" in the new millennium, "we must rediscover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust" and thus conquer our fear of the future. The pope's description of hope is grounded in the merciful love of God and in man's aspiration to goodness: "Now is the time for new hope, which calls us to expel the paralyzing burden of cynicism from the future of politics and of human life. . . . Inspired by the example of all those who have taken the risk of freedom, can we not recommit ourselves also to taking the risk of solidarity—and thus the risk of peace? . . . Hope and trust are the premise of responsible activity and are nurtured in that inner sanctuary of conscience where 'man is alone with God' (*Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 16) and he thus perceives that he is not alone amid the enigmas of existence, for he is surrounded by the love of the Creator! . . . The answer to the fear which darkens human existence at the end of the twentieth century is the common effort to build the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice, and liberty. And the 'soul' of the civilization of love is the culture of freedom: the freedom of individuals and the freedom of nations, lived in self-giving solidarity and responsibility" (43–44).

36. "East Coker," in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1943), 17.

THE EXPERIENCE OF VULNERABILITY AND SHAME

Since 9/11 in New York we have learned in an unexpected and tragic way what it means to be vulnerable, and perhaps this experience has allowed our country to come of age, so to speak. While vulnerability and dependence form part of human existence, few philosophical studies throughout the course of history have addressed these aspects of our fragile condition. Western moral philosophy, as Alasdair MacIntyre remarkably advances in *Dependent Rational Animals*, generally depicts moral agents as though they were always rational, healthy, and untroubled. To cite a case in point, MacIntyre refers to Adam Smith who in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* asserts that the “pleasures of wealth and greatness . . . strike the imagination as something grand and beautiful,” while in instances of illness and old age we are more apt to recognize the false illusions and deception to which such pleasures lead.¹ Rather than embrace a “splenetic philosophy,” however, Smith concedes that the illusions about the acquisition of wealth and greatness, fostered by the imagination of those in good health and humor, are “economically

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 2.

beneficial illusions” and “keep in continual motion the industry of mankind.”² So, rather than confront the transitory character of extrinsic goods such as money and fame, and acknowledge the vulnerability and affliction that mark the human condition, we generally prefer to forego such considerations and thus continue to live by imagination and illusion—by that illusion that we are somehow self-sufficient and superior, as Aristotle’s *megalo-psychos*.³

Such a way of understanding ourselves is highly inadequate, since the experience of vulnerability, the capacity to be injured or harmed, and to thus feel pain and suffering, can unveil to us a profound and essential dimension of human existence. In an essay titled “Self-Interpreting Animals,” Charles Taylor devotes particular consideration to the experience of shame: we may be ashamed of wrong-doing, but shame can also be caused by the lack of certain properties that are essentially attributed to human persons. Because of this lack, I would say that we are vulnerable, afflicted, and thus pained. According to Taylor, a man may, for example, be ashamed of his shrill voice or his effeminate hands: “A shrill voice is . . . something unmanly, betokens hysteria, not something solid, strong, macho, self-contained. It does not radiate a sense of strength, capacity, superiority. Effeminate hands are—effeminate. Both voice and hands clash with what I aspire to be, feel that my dignity demands that I be, as a person, a presence among others.”⁴ The experience of shame or humiliation thus shows us to have some degrading property, or to be base, dishonorable. The shameful or humiliating also refers to the way we see ourselves and to the way we are seen by others. As Taylor puts it, “Something only offends my dignity because it upsets or challenges the way

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Charles Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals,” in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 53.

I present, project, or express myself in public space.”⁵ There is then in this sort of experience of the shameful an aspiration to dignity or excellence, to the quality of being worthy or honorable, but at the same time the experience of reproach and disapproval—disapproval either by others or by oneself. What produces shame or humiliation is opposed to the “grand and beautiful” of which Adam Smith speaks; shame is rather always concerned with the ugly.

The purpose of this essay will be first to consider the experience of vulnerability in reference to the beautiful and the ugly in their external and internal dimensions, and what such an experience can tell us about ourselves and about the meaning of different types of goods. Secondly, I will attempt to show that the vulnerability that is ours due to our bodily existence is surpassed by a vulnerability freely accepted for the sake of a greater good. This second type of vulnerability requires a certain maturity in freedom and the recognition that fullness of life is not contingent on what might be called the wisdom of the world. To this type of wisdom, we will contrast “the wisdom of the cross.” So, in the third instance in this essay I will explore what light the Christian tradition can shed on human vulnerability and suffering. In this part of the essay I will take my cue from contemporary thinkers such as John Paul II, Jacques Maritain, and C. S. Lewis, and will also draw from the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas. Lastly, while bodily vulnerability may lead to disapproval by others or even by oneself, just as we are able to distinguish higher goods and higher forms of life, and in fact speak of the highest good and the best life, so we can speak of a different type of approval or disapproval, of the only type of approval or disapproval that ultimately is of any account.

Although Aristotle does speak of a hierarchy of goods, it is interesting to note how according to him certain aspects of ex-

5. *Ibid.*, 57.

ternal goods produce a sort of beauty of happiness, since they make a person pleasing in the eyes of others, and to be seen as pleasing belongs to the meaning of beauty. Aquinas comments on this point by saying that to be deprived of certain external goods defiles happiness, since it makes a man somewhat contemptible in the eyes of others; such is the case of the man who lacks nobility, or good offspring, or even bodily beauty. A man is not fully happy who presents an ugly appearance, since by this fact he is made despicable in the eyes of others.⁶ While a pleasing appearance is a good thing to possess, we would be mistaken to be so captivated by attractiveness that we would not properly value the qualities of a person who presented an ugly or horrifying appearance. And it is just such a case that MacIntyre presents to us in *Dependent Rational Animals*: a person with a disfigured face is someone from whom we can learn, provided that we are able to separate ourselves from our feelings of dislike or disgust and stand in judgment of them. As MacIntyre says, “What blinds us to our own defects in self-knowledge may also blind us as to the qualities of others. So those captivated by appearance and presentation may not be able to identify, let alone understand, examples of the courage and gracefulness of spirit that can be hard-won responses to afflictions of disfigurement and disablement.”⁷ Clearly, in this example, if we separate ourselves from feelings of disgust before a horrifying appearance, we are better able to recognize the limits of attractiveness, of external goods, and the importance of goods of the soul, internal goods, such as the virtues. The person with the disfigured face may thus provide us with the opportunity to learn about our own good and the good of others. Our awareness of the human good is then closely connected to the proper evaluation and alignment of our feelings.

6. In *I Ethic.*, lect. 13, nn. 159, 163.

7. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 138.

In our contact with those who are vulnerable, we can learn not only to distinguish between external and internal goods, but also to understand ourselves as having demands made on us which are often incompatible with those of desire or feeling. An example of such self-understanding is given by Taylor in the above-mentioned essay. When we come upon someone in trouble, a wounded man, for example, as in the Good Samaritan parable, we may or may not feel any desire to help the man, but we do feel called upon to help him. We feel called upon qua rational beings, or moral beings, or creatures made in the image of God, capable of responding as God does, out of love.⁸ We are, according to Taylor, “*called upon* to act. And we are called upon in virtue of being a certain kind of creature. Even though we may not be very sure in virtue of what we are called on, we know that the obligation lies on us, not on animals, stones, or idiots.”⁹ We are thus being called to act out of a higher standpoint because we recognize that we are a higher sort of being; as such, certain reactions, certain motivations, will not be fitting to us, and we know this because we are capable of judging and discriminating motivations as higher or lower. To this effect, while we are prone to be spiteful and vengeful people, Taylor says that “there is a higher way of seeing our relations to others; which is higher not just in producing happier consequences—less strife, pain, bad blood—but also in that it enables us to see ourselves and others more broadly, more objectively, more truly. One is a bigger person, with a broader, more serene vision, when one can act out of this higher standpoint.”¹⁰ So, to return to the experience of the person who sees a wounded man lying on the road and has a sense of being called on to help, a sense quite different from the desire to help, the demand made on the person is in virtue of the type of subject that he is, that

8. Taylor, “Self-Interpreting Animals,” 58.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 67.

is, an autonomous moral subject, who can respond to the call of what is truly good or worthy.¹¹ He is thus capable of acting from a higher standpoint, of seeing his relations to others in a higher way.

As mentioned above, states of vulnerability can lead us to a recognition of different types of goods—lower and higher goods—and also to the realization that we ourselves are a higher type of being, unlike animals or stones, for whom agency cannot be reduced simply to desire or feeling. Now the state of vulnerability which is present in the example of disfigurement given by MacIntyre can give rise to shame, since the person suffering the disfigurement is deprived of a good due to him had he not undergone burns or an illness producing an ugly appearance. But it is important here to distinguish between external and internal ugliness, just as we distinguish two kinds of beauty. On the one hand, there is spiritual beauty, which consists in a due order and abundance of spiritual goods. By contrast, anything that manifests internal disorder or that proceeds from a lack of spiritual good is ugly. On the other hand, there is external beauty, which consists in a well-proportioned body, in its due ordering, and in an abundance of external things which are related to the body, whereas ugliness is associated with disorder of the body or with a lack of temporal things. Just as internal and external beauty delight and give rise to desire, ugliness arouses shame in both its internal and external dimensions. As Aquinas says, “A person is ashamed of the fact that he is a pauper, or that he has a deformed body, or that he is ignorant, or that he performs disorderly actions. Therefore, since interior ugliness must always be held in contempt, everything that involves shame arising from this kind of ugliness must be disapproved.”¹² Interestingly, as we saw above, it is possible that the

11. *Ibid.*, 73.

12. *Against the Attackers of the Religious Life*, c. 7, ad 9, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, in *The Pocket Aquinas*, ed. V. J. Bourke (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960), 268.

person with a disfigured face—disfigurement here being an example of external ugliness—and with a high degree of virtue, that is, spiritual beauty, might still be disapproved, because our disordered feelings would not let us see beyond the immediate appearance. If our feelings were however properly aligned, we could, as stated previously, learn from the afflicted person about the human good.

Now while most of us would not want to be deprived of certain external goods and thus be afflicted or vulnerable, it is possible that for a higher good a person might assume such vulnerability. To this effect, Aquinas provides us with an interesting example: while even holy men will despise the lack or ugliness of external things, yet with a view to perfection and for the sake of Christ, it may be freely assumed by them. Therefore, the man who is ashamed of this sort of ugliness is not to be disapproved but rather to be greatly praised, should he adopt it because of humility. As Aquinas puts it: “To beg has a certain shame associated with it on the basis of this second kind of ugliness, for every beggar shows himself as a pauper and sometimes he lowers himself to the man from whom he begs and this pertains to external deficiency. Hence, mendicancy adopted for Christ’s sake is not only not to be disapproved, it should be praised greatly.”¹³ Elsewhere Aquinas reiterates the idea that mendicancy involves a certain abasement, and that although activity and governance are naturally superior to receptivity and obedience, there are circumstances that may alter this natural ranking: “To suffer,” Aquinas says, “is more ignoble than to act, to receive than to give, and to be ruled and to obey than to govern and command; however, on account of the addition of some added circumstance, the appraisal can be reversed.”¹⁴ For Aquinas, then, there may be circumstances where sacrificing certain natural goods or enduring certain evils is a way of

13. *Ibid.*

14. *SCG* III, c. 135.

attaining a greater good. So, virtuous humiliation is not therefore an unthinking acceptance of any deprivation. According to Aquinas, the counsels (which more generally could simply be called virtues), that is, the adoption of voluntary poverty, chastity, and obedience, are not for the weak, but rather for those who trusting in divine power and providence freely choose to “cast aside” other things for the sake of the highest good.¹⁵

Since the way to the perfect good, as Aristotle called happiness,¹⁶ does not reside in external goods or in goods of the body but rather in perfect virtue, Aquinas tells us that to arrive at such perfection a free mind is a necessary condition.¹⁷ For this reason, he counsels voluntary poverty: “that a man’s mind, being withdrawn from earthly cares, may be more at liberty to give itself to God.”¹⁸ And elsewhere he says, “Poverty frees a man from that which hinders him from being intent on spiritual things.”¹⁹ For Aquinas, then, man’s greatest good consists in the adherence of his mind to God and divine things.²⁰

In order therefore to assume the vulnerability implicit in poverty, man’s life cannot be seen simply in terms of self-preservation—the preservation of bodily existence. The whole purpose for which the human person, being rational in nature, exists is to contemplate the truth, which is divine activity, and so to be taken into the life of God, our minds must be free of earthly attachments and creatures. In describing the perfect good, the state of happiness, Aquinas says, “Man’s mind will be united to God by one, continual, everlasting operation. But in the present life, insofar as we fall short of the unity and continuity of that operation, so do we fall short of perfect happiness.”²¹

Of course, this is not the wisdom that many of our contemporaries want to hear. For this reason they will disapprove of

15. *ST* III, q. 7, a. 2, ad 3. See also Thomas S. Hibbs, *Virtue’s Splendor* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 193.

16. See *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 2, ad 2.

18. *Ibid.*

20. *SCG* III, c. 130.

17. *SCG* III, c. 132.

19. *SCG* III, c. 133.

21. *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4.

virtues such as the counsels and of a notion of happiness that emphasizes the goods of the soul over the accumulation of external goods, over offspring when and however they are wanted, and over the affirmation of one's will or over the will to power. To assume vulnerability by "casting aside" riches, for example, cannot be understood simply from the goal of a natural perfection. As Aquinas tells us, when the forfeit of external things is adopted for the sake of Christ because of humility, then it is not to be disapproved but rather to "be praised greatly." To become vulnerable to the eyes of the world, for the sake of Christ, requires a larger vision of things than that afforded by the wisdom of the world or even the wisdom of the wise.

We need a new sort of humanism, a new sort of wisdom to enter into that vision. In *The Twilight of Civilization* Maritain speaks of a "humanism of the Incarnation," of an "integral humanism," "which considers man in the integrality of his natural and supernatural being and which sets no a priori limits to the descent of the divine into man."²² It is just this sort of humanism which, I believe, John Paul II has in mind when he says in different ways throughout his writings that man can only understand himself in Christ. As John Paul II puts it in *Fides et Ratio*: "The fundamental conviction of the 'philosophy' found in the Bible is that the world and human life do have a meaning and look towards their fulfillment, which comes in Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Incarnation will always remain the central point of reference for an understanding of the enigma of human existence, the created world, and God himself."²³ The Word of Wisdom, the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ, provides us with a new sort of logic, based on both truth and love, in order to understand human vulnerability, suffering, and the meaning of human life.

22. Jacques Maritain, *The Twilight of Civilization*, trans. Lionel Landry (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), 13.

23. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, sec. 80, par. 3.

In assuming human nature, the Divine Word also freely assumes human vulnerability. For love of perfection, Christ frees himself of riches and human affection so that in perfect freedom and obedience he unites his will to the will of his Father God. The *kenosis* or self-emptying of God is radical: "He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."²⁴ Aquinas argues that no one should doubt as to the pain truly experienced by Christ: "for true bodily pain are required bodily hurt and the sense of hurt. Now Christ's body was able to be hurt, since it was passible and mortal; neither was the sense of hurt wanting to it, since Christ's soul possessed perfectly all natural powers."²⁵ To this effect, Aquinas relies on scriptural authority: "Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows."²⁶ Christ, Beauty itself—the splendor of the Father—is stripped of all glory in his passion and death on the cross; he willingly takes on disfigurement. As Isaiah graphically writes: "There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him: Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not."²⁷ There is no external beauty in this description of "the suffering servant," of Christ; we are told that his appearance arouses no desire; he is rather despised and has been put to shame. This is certainly not the beauty that the wisdom of the world exalts, and yet despite the external aspect of a body deformed by affliction, Aquinas tells us that Christ had a certain divinity and thus beauty which shone from his face.²⁸ The internal beauty

24. Phil. 2:7–8.

25. *ST III*, q. 15, a. 5, resp.

26. *ST III*, q. 15, a. 5, s.c.

27. Isa. 53:2–3.

28. Jordan, "The Evidence of the Transcendentals and the Place of Beauty in Thomas Aquinas," 407.

that radiates outward cannot be seen by everyone—not everyone sees the beauty of self-abasement and obedience, of that complete submission of the Son to the Father. A crucified God certainly inverts our ordinary conceptions of the beautiful and challenges our way of seeing the world.

In commenting on the obscurity or blindness that resulted from original sin, Aquinas says that man in his present state no longer sees God’s radiance shining through the world; man is impeded as regards the vision of spiritual things “because he is distracted by and occupied with sensible things.”²⁹ The wisdom of the cross and with it human vulnerability and suffering can take us out of that distraction and occupation, so as to make us realize that “the world is not the source of man’s ultimate happiness”³⁰—the world is precarious, vulnerable, subject to mortality and corruption, just as the human body is. That aspiration to wholeness or integrity, to the perfect good of happiness, cannot come from the world. It can only come to man from God. “This is why,” according to John Paul II, “Christ speaks of God’s love that expresses itself in the offering of his only Son, so that man ‘might not perish but might have eternal life’ (Jn 3:16). Eternal life can be given to man only by God; it can be only his gift. It cannot be given to man by the created world. Creation—and man together with it—is subject to ‘futility’ (cf. Rom. 8:20).”³¹

So if to understand human life and happiness in terms of mere self-preservation or in terms of the “pleasures of wealth and greatness” is totally inadequate, because of the futility to which man and the world are subject, then understanding and seeing oneself in the Word of Wisdom not only completes the wisdom of the wise, which recognizes the superiority of goods of the soul, but also offers us something radically new. In refer-

29. *STI*, q. 94, a. 1, resp.

30. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 55–56.

31. *Ibid.*, 56.

ring to the way in which God creates and re-creates, that is, restores what he has created after sin, Aquinas uses an important analogy: that of the Divine Artist, his art, which is his Wisdom or Word or eternal concept, and his artifacts or creatures. According to Aquinas, the Son, who is the Word of God, has a common agreement with all creatures, because the word of the craftsman or his concept is an exemplar likeness of everything that is made by him.

Therefore, as creatures are established in their proper species, though movably, by the participation of this likeness, so by the non-participated and personal union of the Word with a creature, it was fitting that the creature should be restored in order to its eternal and unchangeable perfection; for the craftsman by the intelligible form of his art, whereby he fashioned his handiwork, restores it when it has fallen into ruin. And hence man is perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection, as he is rational) by participating the Word of God, as the disciple is instructed by receiving the word of his master. . . . Hence it was fitting that by the Word of true knowledge man might be led back to God, having wandered from God through an inordinate thirst for knowledge.³²

So, not only is the Word of God the exemplar of all creation, he is also the exemplar for man's re-creation, for his restoration. Man's perfection in wisdom thus requires an imitation of the exemplar. To be instructed in the Word of God means not only participation in the fullness of truth but also in the fullness of love and beauty. Just as the Son is in total relation to the Father, surrendering his will to him and loving the salvific will, so too man is called to do likewise. Since by sin man withdraws from the light of reason and of the divine law, then to return to the state prior to sin, it is necessary that man's will should have a movement contrary to the previous movement. Man will need, therefore, to reunite himself to his ultimate principle through

32. *ST III*, q. 3, a. 8, resp.

the path of humility and self-abasement which the Word of Wisdom delineates for us, contrary to the pride which is the beginning of every sin.³³

In *Fides et Ratio* John Paul II says, “Human perfection . . . consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth, but in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving . . . [in which the] person finds a fullness of certainty and security.”³⁴ It is in this interpersonal relationship in which the person brings into play not only his capacity to know but also to entrust himself to another, to others.³⁵ In the exemplar, in the Word of wisdom, we find just this self-giving, and for this reason he is commended as the Son in whom the Father is well pleased. So the vulnerability, pain, and suffering that are ours due to our bodily condition have a special significance. As C. S. Lewis puts it in *The Problem of Pain*:

We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which he will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. . . .³⁶ We were not made primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the Divine Love may rest “well pleased.” To ask that God’s love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because he is what he is, his love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled, by certain stains in our character, and because he already loves us he must labor to make us lovable.³⁷

Our vulnerability, the pain, and suffering experienced due to our precarious state, are meant then for our very perfection. We are to be perfected, restored, made lovable and pleasing to our creator through suffering. Lewis says, “That is why tribu-

33. See *ST I-II*, q. 86, a. 2, resp. and *I-II*, q. 84, a. 2, resp.

34. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, sec. 32, par. 2.

35. *Ibid.*

36. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 30.

37. *Ibid.*, 36.

lations cannot cease until God either sees us remade or sees that our remaking is hopeless.”³⁸

The person’s vulnerability, affliction, and pain are meant to shatter the illusion that all is well and that we are self-sufficient and consequently need only to trust in ourselves (as may have happened on 9/11 in New York). It would seem, then, that in order to really experience the beauty and grandeur that we so desire and for which in this life we often delude ourselves, we ultimately have to face the dreadful.³⁹ A vision of the beautiful, an encounter with the absolute fullness of the good, can only come to us as a result of purification, self-surrender, and trust.⁴⁰ Illness, affliction, sober the soul, and sobriety of this kind belongs to the essence of purity. We can only be purified and transformed by experiencing the dreadful, just as we paradoxically save our life when we lose it.

If vulnerability and suffering are for the sake of perfection, for experiencing eternal life and gazing upon the face of the beautiful, then how we are seen by others in our affliction is of little or no importance—how we are seen by God is what matters, for it is his approval that we really seek. And in facing him, we will be known by him and in that instant we will know whether we are approved or disapproved. As C. S. Lewis so graphically puts it, “In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.”⁴¹

38. *Ibid.*, 94.

39. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 127.

40. *ST II-II*, q. 19, a. 12, s.c. and resp.

41. C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 10.

ON THE GOOD AND GLORY

It is possible to speak of man's desire for the good and for happiness in relation to the experience of beauty, to an experience which calls us beyond ourselves, beyond a simply natural happiness and an earthly dwelling place. (Beauty in Greek is named *kallos*, which is derived from the verb "to call.")¹ To better understand man's destiny, we can turn to the notion of glory, which is promised to us in scripture, and which has been the subject of reflection for many Christian thinkers, including Thomas Aquinas.² Although Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that man's happiness does not consist in human glory, there is however an important sense in which beatitude for Aquinas does necessitate glory.

In this essay I wish to consider the relationship between virtue, honor, and glory in Aquinas and to show how glory can be taken to mean either fame with men or fame with God. If we are susceptible of being glorified, as it were, or "clarified," as Aquinas puts it, this glory or clarity implies a certain dis-

1. In his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names*, chapter 4, Aquinas invokes the Greek meaning of *kallos* as "to call," in insisting on Dionysius's conception of God as the cause of harmony, "calling all things to himself."

2. See Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 1-15.

play.³ Our actions that are revelatory of our being display us to others; through our actions, good or bad, we can become the recipients of glory or of shame.⁴ And the glory that we receive for our virtuous acts, for our excellence, can be sought for different reasons. Depending on our intention, we will either affirm the true good or negate it; we will order our good acts to their due end, or we will act in a way that is not proportionate to our rightful end. We will thus answer the call of Beauty or alienate ourselves from the true good.

HONOR, PRAISE, AND GLORY: THEIR RELATION TO HAPPINESS

Aquinas defines honor as an attestation to a person's excellence.⁵ Men receive honor from other men by means of signs, that is, by words that testify to a person's virtue or excellence, or by deeds, such as bowing, offering a gift, erecting a statue. Honor thus considered denotes something external and corporeal. It makes known the good and the beautiful.⁶ Although in public life men do place happiness in honor, for nothing in human affairs seems to be greater, both Aquinas and Aristotle claim that honor is not an adequate reward for virtue; it is rather an extrinsic and superficial good.⁷ While happiness is a good that can be obtained by man through his will, it is not in man's power to secure honor; it is rather in the power of others to pay him honor.⁸

Like honor, praise also consists of signs, but since praise is given only by verbal signs, honor is more extensive than praise. Besides, praise is also distinguished from honor because in praising a person's excellence, we do so in reference to an end, whereas we honor virtue or excellence for itself. Thus we praise

3. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 1, resp.

5. *ST II-II*, q. 103, a. 1, resp.

7. *In I Ethic.*, lect. 5, n. 64.

4. *ST II-II*, q. 144, a. 2, resp.

6. *ST II-II*, q. 103, a. 1, ad 2.

8. *SCG III*, c. 28.

those who work well for an end; honor, however, is given to the best, that is, to those who have already arrived at the end.⁹

According to Aquinas, the effect of honor and praise is glory, for in testifying to a person's excellence, the person's goodness becomes known or becomes clear to many. The word *glory* signifies "clear knowledge together with praise."¹⁰ Properly speaking, glory denotes that someone's good is known and approved by others.¹¹ However, the word *glory* does have a broader meaning, whereby glory consists not only in the knowledge of many or a few, but also in the knowledge of oneself, when, for example, one considers that one's own good, whether bodily or spiritual, is worthy of praise.

Human glory or fame is for Aquinas often deceptive and lacking in stability, since human knowledge frequently fails where contingent singulars, such as human acts, are concerned.¹² And since human opinion and praise can change, man's perfect good must be other than glory. It is evident that man's true good could never consist in what is false or unstable. The perfection of the human good that is called "happiness" does not depend on human knowledge as its cause. Human knowledge of another's good or happiness proceeds from the good existing in the person himself and thus presupposes perfect or inchoate happiness.¹³ Human knowledge and praise do not therefore constitute man's happiness or his good; rather, as Aquinas says, "Man's good depends on God's knowledge as its cause. And therefore man's beatitude depends, as on its cause, on the glory which man has with God."¹⁴ Therefore, the only glory that man really needs is glory with God; man needs to be known and approved by God, and if he is, he will have attained that happiness that is the true good.

9. *ST II-II*, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3.

11. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 1, resp.

13. *ST I-II*, a. 2, a. 3, ad 2.

10. *Ibid.*

12. *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

14. *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

VAINGLORY VERSUS MAGNANIMITY;
OPINION VERSUS TRUTH

Aquinas reminds us, however, that man's desire for honor, for glory, arises from man's very desire for happiness.¹⁵ It is therefore relatively easy to mistake honor and human glory for happiness. Our desire to be known and approved may even become a desire for vain or empty glory. Aquinas outlines three ways in which glory may be termed vain: first, when a man seeks glory for what is unworthy of glory, that is, for a merely transient good; second, when a man seeks to be glorified by someone whose judgment is dubious; and third, when a man does not refer the desire for glory to a rightful end, such as God's honor or the spiritual well-being of his neighbor.¹⁶ These instances of vainglory find further expression in Aquinas: for example, while it pertains to honesty or virtue to be appropriately dressed, it is possible that a person seek glory from excessive attention to outward apparel; obviously, while dress is a good, it is only a useful, temporal good, not meriting to be sought as an end nor to be gloried in.

The more weighty a man's attestation to another's acts is considered to be, the more is the other person honored, glorified, or ashamed.¹⁷ We seek to be honored by wise and virtuous men because of the rectitude of their judgment, whereas we would not be glorified or ashamed by children and the lower animals because of their lack of judgment.¹⁸ To seek glory from the latter or from those whose judgment is, as Aquinas puts it, "uncertain," would indeed be an instance of the desire for a glory that is empty. While the correct judgment of a prudent man may confirm and assure another in the opinion that he has of himself, that is, the opinion that he has formed that he is a good man, he may be pursuing honor solely for himself and thus tak-

15. *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 3.

17. *ST II-II*, q. 144, a. 4, resp.

16. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 1, resp.

18. *ST II-II*, q. 144, a. 3, resp.

ing empty pleasure in human praise. Such a desire for honor would be inordinate and thus also an instance of ambition, for the excellence or good that a man possesses he has not from himself, but rather is a participation in something divine; therefore, honor is due principally to God and not to man. In addition, the good given to man by God is to enable him to profit others, so instead of man's appetite resting in honor itself, a man will be pleased that others bear witness to his excellence, as this allows him to profit others.¹⁹ Thus, to be known and praised by others, to be honored and glorified, is not to be sought for itself as though it were the end of man's life.

Aquinas makes it clear that for man's perfection he should know himself, and that to be known by others is not to be desired in itself. He does, however, add that our being known and praised by others may be useful, either for the sake of glorifying God since he is the giver of the gifts for which we are being praised, or for the sake of making men become better due to the good that they recognize in another and seek to emulate, or for the sake of making the man, who is known and praised for the good he has, strive to persevere in that good and become better still. "In this sense," Aquinas says, "it is praiseworthy that a man should take care of his good name, and that he should provide good things in the sight of God and men: but not that he should take an empty pleasure in human praise."²⁰

If man dwells on the honor accorded to him, he puts his hope in an extrinsic and superficial good, which depends for the most part on the opinion of others. Thus, honor is described by Aquinas as the reward conferred on us by others who can give nothing greater than honor as a reward for virtue.²¹ To glory in honor is to think much of what in reality is very little. Aquinas thus considers vainglory to be opposed to magnanimity. Although the magnanimous man does strive to do what is deserving of

19. *ST II-II*, q. 131, a. 1, resp.

20. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 1, ad 3.

21. *ST II-II*, q. 131, a. 1, ad 2.

honor, he does not think much of the honor accorded by men.²² “Honor is of little account to him.”²³ As Aquinas puts it: “The magnanimous man cares more for truth than for opinion. . . . It is incompatible with magnanimity for a man to glory in the testimony of human praise; wherefore it is said of the magnanimous man (*Ethic.* IV) that he cares not to be praised.”²⁴ Since by its very name magnanimity denotes the “stretching forth of the mind to great things,”²⁵ Aquinas warns us against “the desire for glory, since it *enslaves the mind*, which a magnanimous man should ever strive to keep untrammelled.”²⁶ The inordinate desire for honor and praise, for glory, which extrinsic good man seeks to have for himself, does not allow man to be satisfied with enjoying the good that he has, and so, vainglory disposes a man to lose his inward goods.²⁷ The man who does virtuous deeds for the sake of human glory is not truly virtuous.²⁸

According to Aquinas, the desire for vain or empty glory is tantamount to seeking after lying.²⁹ This is evident in what Aquinas says regarding the virtue of truth, and more specifically, the truth of life, and in his account of the so-called daughters of glory, of which we will give here a few examples. The virtue of truth is directed to another, insofar as a person reveals or manifests to another the things that regard himself.³⁰ And as social beings we owe to one another the manifestation of truth.³¹ In speaking of the truth of life, Aquinas is emphasizing the agreement that should prevail between the external sign and the interior of man; it is “that truth whereby a man, both in life and in speech, shows himself to be such as he is, and the things that concern him, not other, and neither greater nor less, than they are.”³² It therefore belongs to the virtue of truth

22. *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 1, ad 3.

24. *Ibid.*

26. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 2, s.c. (emphasis mine).

27. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 3, ad 3.

29. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 1, resp.

31. *ST II-II*, q. 114, a. 2, ad 1.

23. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 2, ad 1.

25. *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 1, resp.

28. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 1, ad 2.

30. *ST II-II*, q. 109, a. 3, resp.

32. *ST II-II*, q. 109, a. 3, ad 3.

to show ourselves outwardly such as we are, although Aquinas also adds that by this virtue a man may decline from the truth toward what is less, and when he does so it would seem that it is for the purpose of living agreeably with others.³³ For example, a man does not have to show the whole good that is in him; he does not have to manifest the whole of his science, holiness, talents. According to Aquinas, “This is done without prejudice to the truth, since the lesser is contained in the greater. . . . For those who represent themselves as being greater than they are, are a source of annoyance to others, since they seem to surpass others, whereas those who make less account of themselves are a source of pleasure, since they seem to defer to others by their moderation.”³⁴ Aquinas ends this example by referring to the words of the apostle Paul: “Though I should have a mind to glory, I shall not be foolish, for I will say the truth” (2 Cor. 12:6).³⁵ Vainglory is thus presented as folly and contrary to the truth.

In further explaining how the external deed should agree with the interior of man, Aquinas turns to a “daughter” of vainglory, namely, hypocrisy, which is in effect contrary to the virtue of truth. The outward deed is, or should be, a natural sign of the intention of the agent.³⁶ So, when a man does a good work that pertains to the service of God and seeks thereby to please men rather than God, he pretends to have a right intention that in reality he has not.³⁷ The man who acts in this fashion subordinates God’s interests to worldly purposes, since by making a show of his saintly conduct he seeks to turn men not to God, but to draw to himself the applause of their approval. Such a man, according to Aquinas, makes “a lying pretense of having a good intention,” which he has not, although he does not pretend to do a good work without doing it.³⁸ The man whose outward deed

33. *ST II-II*, q. 111, a. 1, resp. and *ST II-II*, q. 109, a. 4, resp.

34. *ST II-II*, q. 109, a. 4, resp.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *ST II-II*, q. 111, a. 2, ad 1.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

is good but who does not have a right intention seeks thereby to please not God but men, and thus seeks the approval of men rather than the approval of God. He thus desires fame with men rather than with God, hence human glory, vainglory. The man who loves to be honored and praised, who seeks to receive human glory, thinks that in this way he acquires a certain fame or distinction in the knowledge of others.³⁹

KNOWING AND BEING KNOWN. LOVING
AND BEING LOVED

It would seem, then, that all of us are prone to the desire for vainglory. Aquinas quotes Chrysostom who says, "Vainglory finds a place even in the servants of Christ."⁴⁰ And elsewhere, he quotes Gregory that "it belongs to the very perfect, by outward deeds so to seek the glory of their author, that they are not inwardly uplifted by the praise awarded them."⁴¹ So given that we are probably not counted among "the very perfect," we might say that we all want to be publicly praised and acknowledged.⁴² We want whatever good we do or possess to be known and loved; we want to please. And yet, as we have said before, our happiness does not consist in fame or human glory.

As Aquinas says, "It is better to know than to be known: because only the higher things know; whereas the lowest are known."⁴³ Since the supreme element of any rational creature is his intellect, his beatitude will consist in his most perfect operation; thus, the beatitude of the rational creature consists in the noblest act of his intellectual vision.⁴⁴ The human mind, insofar as it is able, is ordered to comprehend all there is; man's desire is to know what is ultimate and perfect.⁴⁵ To glory in the honor

39. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 4, ad 2.

41. *ST II-II*, q. 112, a. 2, s.c.

43. *SCG III*, c. 29.

45. *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

40. *ST II-II*, q. 132, a. 3, s.c.

42. Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, 186.

44. *De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 1, resp.

that others accord us constitutes a deviation from the ordering of the human mind to what is perfect, to the truth. It is for this reason that Aquinas opposes vainglory to magnanimity since the latter does not enslave the mind to the pursuit of extrinsic and superficial goods, but rather liberates the mind so that it can aspire to what is truly honorable and good.

Now just as Aquinas says that it is better to know than to be known, since the intellectual soul possesses a potency unto infinity, he also says that it is better to love than to be loved. As he puts it, "Men wish to be loved in as much as they wish to be honored. For just as honor is bestowed on a man in order to bear witness to the good which is in him, so by being loved a man is shown to have some good, since good alone is lovable."⁴⁶ Therefore, men seek to be loved and honored for the sake of making known the good that is in them, whereas Aquinas says that "those who have charity seek to love for the sake of loving . . . [since] it is more proper to charity to wish to love than to wish to be loved."⁴⁷ Just as the human mind when it knows is united to the known and continues to know, the capacity of the rational creature is increased by love because the heart is enlarged when it loves.⁴⁸ The perfection of man consists in knowing and loving—knowing the ultimate truth and loving the perfect good; man's perfection consists in activity and not in what apparently seems to be passivity, that is, in being known and being loved. And yet, there is a sense in which man's happiness does include the latter, and to which we have referred above as fame with God, approval of the creature by God. How do we then incorporate this seemingly passive aspect of man's being, of his nature, in the actuality of his perfection? I will attempt to briefly indicate what I think could be a possible way of answering this question.

As we said at the start of this essay and as has been evident

46. *ST II-II*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 2.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *ST II-II*, q. 24, a. 7, ad 2.

through the examples given, our being and our actions are expressive; they somehow present us to others and thus are always open to the interpretation and judgment of others. Therefore, when our goodness, our good actions, being expressive and communicative, are known and approved by others, we are the recipients of glory. So we might say that being, action, gives itself to be known and is received by a knowing subject. In the case of man, his being, his actions, communicate to others, and what is received by others is judged favorably or unfavorably; through their praise or reproach, man is known and may thus be glorified or put to shame. The human person is thus in relation to others: he knows and is known, he loves and is loved.

A fuller explanation of this relationality of the human person has to be sought, I think, in the supreme model of what it means to be a person, that is, in the Christian notion of God as personally triune. As W. Norris Clarke puts it in his Aquinas lecture of 1993 titled *Person and Being*, "Within the unity of the Supreme Being the Father is subsistent Self-communication, while the Son is subsistent Receptivity (the Holy Spirit as well in its own unique mode), but both aspects are equally valuable and integral to what it means to be."⁴⁹ I think this can be put in terms which will relate more specifically to the topic at hand: from all eternity the Father knows and loves the Son, and the Son is known and loved by the Father; the Father takes delight in his Son. Because the human person is made in the image and likeness of the Triune God, and because the Son is the Image of the Father through whom all was made, the person as a rational created being desires not only to know and to love, he also desires to be known and to be loved. His challenge, however, is to focus his attention from the human faces that approve him to the Divine Face that holds true commendation and glory. So

49. W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *Person and Being* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette University Press, 1993), 87.

rather than please men, his task should be to give delight to God (as the Son, in whose image he is made, gives delight to his Father), much as the artifact might give delight to its maker, being what it is, and doing what it ought. In this way man will answer the call of Beauty, of the True Good, and be united with that Beauty that will one day approve and glorify him.

Finally, from the moment of his creation, man was approved, that is, he was found to be very good. We might say that this initial commendation is constitutive of man's being, and that his desire for approval will be satisfied only when in his return to God he will be found to be in conformity with the Image or Idea according to which he was created, and thus found to be very good and delightful to the Creator.

HUMAN LIFE AND THE WORLD TRANSFIGURED

There is a great convergence of thought between Thomas Aquinas and John Paul II, although as is well known the late pope's intellectual formation was also influenced by the phenomenological school. Concerning the latter influence, I wish only to point to John Paul II's sensitivity to the language of signs—what appears as purely physical is the bearer of meaning and as such can be “read” and known. It is interesting to note that while contemporary culture is to a great extent very secularized, it is nonetheless sensitive to the presence of signs in its midst.¹

Now from the beginning of his pontificate John Paul II directed our gaze to Christ the Redeemer because, as he put it, the human person can only find meaning and understand himself by contemplating and assimilating the mystery of the redemption. Christ reveals man to himself, because he is the revelation of God's love for man, and man can only comprehend himself and his life in an encounter with this love.² It becomes therefore imperative that the human person draw near to

1. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1996), sec. 25, par. 4.

2. See John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1979), sec. 10, par. 1.

Christ, and in so doing he will be struck by a sense of wonder at the mystery of God and of man himself. Christ enlightens men's minds and hearts; his light is transformative provided we seek to live the truth he makes known to us. Our lives transfigured by the light of Christ will bear witness to the love of God, and the eloquent language of a transfigured life will be capable of amazing the world.³

In embarking on the new millennium, John Paul II focused our attention on the light of Christ and called us to respond to this light in such a way that we would become its reflection. The magnificence of his words in a passage from *Novo Millennio Ineunte* need to be cited for the challenge and hope that these words contain:

A new century, a new millennium, are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its "reflection." This is the *mysterium lunae*, which was so much a part of the contemplation of the Fathers of the Church, who employed this image to show the Church's dependence on Christ, the Sun whose light she reflects. It was a way of expressing what Christ himself said when he called himself the "light of the world" (Jn 8:12) and asked his disciples to be "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). This is a daunting task if we consider our human weakness, which so often renders us opaque and full of shadows. But it is a task which we can accomplish if we turn to the light of Christ and open ourselves to the grace which makes us a new creation.⁴

As we journey forward in this new millennium, John Paul II's intellectual and spiritual legacy reminds us of the great responsibility that Christian men and women have. He exhorted Christians to live in consonance with their faith, to be conformed to the light of Christ, and so to bear witness to him, to become, as it were, a sign of divine life.

3. *Vita Consecrata*, sec. 20, par. 2.

4. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Boston: Pauline Books, 2001), sec. 54, pars. 1–2.

Although the Christian vision leads to the expectation of “new heavens” and “a new earth,” this does not lessen but rather increases our responsibility for the world today.⁵ Christians have a unique task: “[They] are called to restore to creation all its original value. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, they share in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone” (cf. I Cor. 15:28; Jn 12:32).⁶ The man or woman who is or has become a Christian has in fact become identified with Christ himself; this dignity of the Christian also brings with it the demand of acting as Christ did. Union with Christ leads to mission: to reveal to others the face of God as Christ did and so to initiate them into the paths of divine life. As John Paul II put it, the communion of each individual with Christ “will become a *sign* for all the world and a compelling *force* that will lead persons to faith in Christ.”⁷ From an observation of the Christian life, of men and women who through their actions and being “shine out” with the light of Christ because they have become deified,⁸ people will be struck with wonder, with a desire to understand the cause of such a life. Just as the beauty of nature has led in the past to the knowledge of God, now the beauty of a life lived in consonance with the light of Christ can become for many a “new” access to God. Such an access requires, in my estimation, a theology of light, of glory, which has been called a theology of beauty, and which is present in the writings of John Paul II, as well as of Thomas Aquinas, although in the latter not as explicitly developed as in the former. According to John Paul II, “the religion founded upon Jesus Christ is a reli-

5. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (Boston: Pauline Books, 2003), sec. 20, par. 1.

6. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1988), sec. 14, par. 8.

7. *Ibid.*, sec. 31, par. 8.

8. *Ibid.*, sec. 14, par. 6, and sec. 15, par. 8.

gion of glory.”⁹ Glory here can be understood as divine radiance, the irradiation of the good.¹⁰ Since beauty chiefly consists in light, a theology of glory will obviously be concerned with beauty. The purpose of this essay will be to set the foundations for a theology of glory or beauty, by concentrating briefly on what Aquinas says regarding the human person as image and the task which man, as image of God, has with respect to the rest of creation.

To describe and understand God’s creative activity, Aquinas often uses the metaphor of the divine artist. The knowledge of God which is one with his being is the cause of all things insofar as his will is joined to it. God’s knowledge is to creatures as the knowledge of the artist is to the things made by his art.¹¹ Just as the artist works through the word conceived in his intellect and through the love of his will for some object, so also Aquinas speaks of God’s creative activity: “God the Father [makes] the creature through his Word, which is his Son, and through his Love, which is the Holy Spirit.”¹² The Word that is begotten immaterially from the Father is called the Son to show that he is of the same nature as the Father; he is also called Image to show that he is altogether like the Father.¹³ The Word is the perfect reflection of that of which he is the Image, and so he is said to be beautiful.¹⁴ In fact, all the three conditions of beauty are attributed to the Son or the Word: first, integrity or perfection, because the Son has in himself “truly and perfectly the nature of the Father”; there is in him “supreme and primal life”; second, harmony or due proportion, because there exists in him as Image of the Father “wondrous proportion and primal equality”; third, brightness or clarity, since the Son as Word “is the light and splendor of the intellect,” “the art of the omnipotent

9. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1994), sec. 6, par. 2.

10. Karol Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 181.

11. *STI*, q. 14, a. 8, resp.

12. *STI*, q. 45, a. 6, resp.

13. *STI*, q. 34, a. 2, ad 3.

14. *STI*, q. 39, a. 8, resp. See q. 93, a. 1, ad 2.

God.”¹⁵ In attributing the name Image to the Son, Aquinas also relies on the authority of scripture, as in the words: “Who is the Image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature” (Col. 1:15), or “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the figure of his substance” (Heb. 1:3).¹⁶

Now since all things have been created through the Word or the Son, they participate through their being and form (through which the creature is determined to a species, and Aquinas says that species is appropriated to the Son)¹⁷ in the beauty of the perfect Image. The relationship between the latter and the production of man is expressed in terms of the exemplar and its copy. While the Son is the perfect Image of the Father, being equal and identical in nature to him, in man there is some likeness to God, having been copied from God as from an exemplar; this likeness is not however one of equality, since the exemplar infinitely surpasses the copy. There is then in man a likeness to God, not a perfect likeness, but rather imperfect. Aquinas adds that “Scripture implies the same when it says that man was made to God’s likeness; for the preposition ‘to’ signifies a certain approach, as of something at a distance.”¹⁸ Aquinas further explains that man is said to be an image by reason of his likeness to the exemplar, that is, by reason of his intellectual soul, and that man is also said to be created to the image of God since he is an imperfect likeness of God.¹⁹ The image of God exists in man as in something of a different nature from God; therefore, Aquinas says, “in order to express the imperfect character of the divine

15. *ST I*, q. 39, a. 8, resp.

16. *ST I*, q. 35, a. 2, resp.

17. *ST I*, q. 39, a. 8, resp.

18. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 1, resp.

19. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 1, ad 2: “The First-Born of creatures is the perfect Image of God, reflecting perfectly that of which he is the Image, and so he is said to be the *Image*, and never *to the image*. But man is said to be both *image* by reason of the likeness; and *to the image* by reason of the imperfect likeness. And since the perfect likeness to God cannot be except in an identical nature, the Image of God exists in his first-born Son; as the image of the king is in his son, who is of the same nature as himself; whereas it exists in man as in an alien nature, as the image of the king is in a silver coin, as Augustine explains in *De decem Chordis* (*Serm. IX.al.XCVI, De Tempore*).”

image in man, man is not simply called the image, but to the image, whereby is expressed a certain movement of tendency to perfection.”²⁰ This tendency can also be considered in terms of a greater likeness of the image to the exemplar, whereby the image becomes more like God and is assimilated to him.²¹ For this reason Aquinas says that likeness may be considered as subsequent to image, since it is said that an image is like or unlike what it represents, and according to the degree of likeness the representation is either perfect or imperfect.²² The perfection or completion of the image thus consists in representing the exemplar or the original, of which it is a copy, by its likeness to it, and so the end of the image, its purpose, is to acquire divine similitude.²³

Since to the exemplar are attributed all the features of beauty, as was explained above, man as image is meant to imitate divine beauty in some way. Aquinas in fact notes that “no one cares to make an image, except for the sake of the beautiful.”²⁴ Aquinas also attributes beauty to the act of reason,²⁵ and so man images God, participates in beauty, through his intellectual nature. Man can more perfectly be like God by imitating the being and activity of God, which are those of a pure spirit knowing and loving itself. To the degree that man knows and

20. *ST I*, q. 35, a. 2, ad 3.

21. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 9, resp.: “Likeness is a kind of unity, for oneness in quality causes likeness, as the Philosopher says (*Metaph. V*, 15). Now, since one is a transcendental, it is both common to all, and adapted to each single thing, just as the good and the true. Wherefore, as the good can be compared to each individual thing both as its preamble, and as subsequent to it, as signifying some perfection in it, so also in the same way there exists a kind of comparison between *likeness* and *image*. For the good is a preamble to man, inasmuch as man is an individual good; and, again, the good is subsequent to man, inasmuch as we may say of a certain man that he is good, by reason of his perfect virtue. In like manner, likeness may be considered in the light of a preamble to image, inasmuch as it is more general than image, as we have said above (a. 1): and, again, it may be considered as subsequent to image, inasmuch as it signifies a certain perfection of the image. For we say that an image is like or unlike what it represents, according as the representation is perfect or imperfect.”

22. *Ibid.*

23. *SCG III*, c. 19.

24. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, 273.

25. *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3.

loves God, he will become more like God and will thus bring to completion the image that he is and will participate more fully in beauty.

Aquinas makes clear how the proper or improper use of man's intellectual nature contributes to the approach to or the distancing of the image from the exemplar. As he sees it, in order to understand God, it is natural that the mind make use of reason for it is there that the image of God is found in the soul; according to Aquinas, this image may be found in different conditions: "*whether this image of God be so obsolete, as it were clouded, as almost to amount to nothing, as in those who have not the use of reason; or obscured and disfigured, as in sinners, or clear and beautiful, as in the just; as Augustine says (De Trin. XIV, 6).*"²⁶ In order to further explain how the image that is man will be perfected, how it will achieve a greater likeness to God, Aquinas also relies on the authority of another Father of the Church, namely, Damascene who says (*De Fid. Orth. II, 12*) that "the image implies an intelligent being, endowed with free will and self-movement, whereas likeness implies a likeness of power, [and] is said to belong to the love of virtue: for there is no virtue without love of virtue."²⁷ In virtuous living man acts in accordance with his rational nature, and such action Aquinas characterizes as spiritually beautiful.²⁸ Virtue makes man more like God, whereas sin makes him unlike God. Since human nature by reason of the act of sin is not perfect, Aquinas tells us that man by himself cannot rise from sin.²⁹

26. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 8, ad 3.

27. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 9, resp.

28. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, resp.

29. *ST II-II*, q. 86, a. 1, resp.: "Now man's soul has a twofold comeliness; one from the refulgence of the natural light of reason, whereby he is directed in his actions; the other, from the refulgence of the divine light, namely, of wisdom and grace, whereby man is also perfected for the purpose of doing good and fitting actions. Now, when the soul cleaves to things by love, there is a kind of contact in the soul: and when man sins, he cleaves to certain things, against the light of reason and of the divine law, as shown above (q. 71, a. 6). Wherefore the loss of comeliness occasioned by this contact, is metaphorically called a stain on the soul."

In the state of original justice man possessed all the virtues.³⁰ His reason was subject to God and his lower powers subject to reason. It is interesting to note that the first man Adam, before his fall into sin, is described as “refulgent with brightness.”³¹ After the fall, however, “he incurs a stain, inasmuch as he forfeits the lustre of grace through the deformity of sin.”³² Disorder enters man’s nature, as well as the world, through sin; man no longer possesses the light of grace. Just as order is “the chief beauty in things,” it may be said that disorder is the privation of beauty.³³ Man’s nature can only be restored by God, and so Aquinas says, “For since the lustre of grace springs from the shedding of divine light, this lustre cannot be brought back, except God sheds his light anew.”³⁴ So for man to become like God, to imitate him, man as image had to be re-created. While it is true that the light of natural reason whereby we discern good from evil is nothing else than the imprint on us of the divine light,³⁵ and that sin cannot entirely take away from man the fact that he is a rational being, it is nevertheless the case that the sin of the first man not only destroyed the gift of original justice which held together all the powers of man in a certain order but also diminished the good of nature, namely, the natural inclination to virtue. Man’s nature wounded by sin cannot do all the good natural to it; it cannot be restored by itself. So the Son of God, Light from Light, who assumes human nature, restores man’s nature and thus reconciles man with God. What Aquinas calls “the image of re-creation” is found in the just,³⁶ in those justified by God’s grace through the redemptive work of the Incarnate God, the Son. And yet, the re-created image is for an ulterior image, which Aquinas calls “the image of glory,” and which is found only in the blessed, that is, in those who have attained eternal life.³⁷

30. *ST I*, q. 95, a. 3, resp.

32. *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 7, resp.

34. *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 7, resp.

36. *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4, resp.

31. *ST I*, q. 95, a. 3, s.c.

33. *SCG III*, c. 71.

35. *ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 2, resp.

37. *Ibid.*

Now the God who creates is also a provident God, directing all things toward their end. Since the end of man, life everlasting, which consists in seeing God, in the vision of the divine essence, exceeds created nature, the rational creature is led toward his end, directed, as it were, by God. That part of divine providence which directs rational creatures toward the end of eternal life is called predestination; Aquinas says that "predestination is a kind of type of the ordering of some persons towards eternal salvation, existing in the divine mind, [and that] the execution of predestination is the calling and magnification [or justification], according to the Apostle (Rom. 8:30)."³⁸ Aquinas quotes scripture (Eph. 1:4-5) to further explain what is meant by predestination: "God chose us in him before the foundation of the world."³⁹ "He hath predestined us unto the adoption of children of God."⁴⁰ Man is adopted as to the gifts of grace and of glory.⁴¹ By bestowing his grace, which is according to Aquinas "a certain beauty of the soul,"⁴² God makes man whom he adopts worthy to receive the inheritance of eternal life, of divine beatitude.⁴³ Those foreknown by God have also been predestined by him to "become conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). Now man is likened to the Son or the Eternal Word since he was made through the Word. He is also likened to the Word of God due to his intellectual nature. Man is, moreover, likened to the Eternal Word "as to the oneness of the Word with the Father, which is by reason of grace and charity. . . . And this likeness perfects the adoption: for to those who are thus like him the eternal inheritance is due."⁴⁴ By the work of creation God communicates to man a certain likeness to himself, whereas by the work of adoption God communicates to those whom he foreknew the likeness of natural son-

38. *ST I*, q. 23, a. 2, resp.

40. *ST III*, q. 23, a. 1, s.c.

42. *ST I-II*, q. 110, a. 2, s.c.

44. *ST III*, q. 23, a. 3, resp.

39. *ST I*, q. 23, a. 4, s.c.

41. *ST III*, q. 23, a. 1, ad 1.

43. *ST III*, q. 23, a. 1, resp.

ship. Aquinas says, “Man is likened to the splendor of the Eternal Son by reason of the light of grace which is attributed to the Holy Ghost. Therefore adoption, though common to the whole Trinity, is appropriated to the Father as its author; to the Son, as its exemplar; to the Holy Spirit, as imprinting on us the likeness of the exemplar.”⁴⁵ Just as the work of creation has as its exemplar the radiance of the Father, divine art, so also the work of adoption is described in terms of divine artistry, for the Spirit “restores nature to the beauty of the divine model, and returns to man his resemblance to God.”⁴⁶

The restoration and elevation of man’s nature to divine sonship is made possible, as was said above, through the Incarnate Word. As Aquinas so clearly puts it: “The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods.”⁴⁷ God therefore becomes man so that man might become God.⁴⁸ Man becomes a “son of light”; he does indeed become “light” itself. The mystery of the Incarnation thus lays the foundations for an anthropology that moves toward God himself and toward man’s “divinization.”⁴⁹

Now since each thing acts according to its nature, man’s nature restored by grace, made a participant of divine life, has the capacity to act in consonance with Christ, the perfect Image, the model. Aquinas tells us that an effect is most perfect when it returns to its source, and that the intellectual creature returns to God not only in likeness of nature but also by its activity. Those who have been predestined to be “sons in the Son”⁵⁰ have been sent, as it were, to play a special role in the perfection of the

45. *ST III*, q. 23, a. 2, ad 3.

46. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus de sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate*, 34 (*PG* 75, 609), cited in St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, “The Great Unknown,” in *Christ Is Passing By* (Chicago: Scepter Press, 1973), sec. 134, par. 5.

47. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusc.* 57:1-4n.

48. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, sec. 23, par. 2.

49. *Ibid.*

50. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1993), sec. 18, par. 1.

universe, in the return of all things to God. The initial order of the universe is in view of the order of the whole to God, and divine providence is responsible for the ordination of things to their end. In ordering and directing creatures to the end, the intellectual creature, man, is made a special participant in God's providence, for it belongs to intellect to order. Thus, the intellectual creature by means of his proper activities, illuminated by the light of grace, can move and rule all other creatures, returning them to their end. Imbued with the light of grace and that of Christ, the Christian or adopted son has as his task "the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan."⁵¹ Just as God freely brought into existence the order of the universe, man also is called upon to freely execute the order established by divine wisdom. It is not surprising then that the true development of this world by the work of humanity should be the prelude for the definitive kingdom of God.⁵² In fact, in speaking of the end time and the cleansing of the world, Aquinas says, "All that is ugly and vile will be cast with the wicked into hell, and all that is beautiful and noble will be taken up for the glory of the elect."⁵³ Through activity governed by the light of grace and the light of Christ, man will be able to bring about what is "beautiful and noble" for the ultimate renewal of the universe, drawing all things, as Christ did, to God the Father. Man's works are not therefore irrelevant to the kingdom of God.

In freely cooperating with grace, man's activities will moreover transform him, as Paul says, "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), from the re-created image to the image of glory. Just as the re-created man, the predestined son, journeys toward his final glorification, the world too will be renewed, for the world as man's dwelling place should befit the dweller. And since the

51. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, sec. 20, par. 1.

52. John Paul II, *God, Father and Creator* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1996), 257.

53. *ST Suppl.* q. 74, a. 9, resp.

world was made to be man's dwelling and man will be renewed, so also the world.⁵⁴ Everything will at last be bathed in the light of God's glory; everything will "shine out with greater brightness" and beauty,⁵⁵ for God will at last be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). While man's intellect, assisted by the light of glory, will see God in his essence, man's carnal eye will see God in his corporeal effects. As Aquinas says, "The renewal of the world is directed to the end that after this renewal has taken place God may become visible to man by signs so manifest as to be perceived as it were by his senses."⁵⁶ In this regard, Aquinas also quotes from Augustine: "It is very credible that we shall so see the mundane bodies of the new heaven and the new earth, so as to see most clearly God everywhere present, governing all corporeal things, not as we now see the invisible things of God as understood by those that are made, but as when we see men . . . we do not believe but see that they live."⁵⁷ While at the present moment, we are merely imperfect images, imperfect signs, that can by grace and the light of Christ lead others to knowledge of God, we are not to forget that our light and beauty is a participation in God's unfathomable light and so that the glory, the beauty, is all his.

54. *ST Suppl.* q. 91, a. 1, s.c.

55. *ST Suppl.* q. 91, a. 3, s.c. and resp.

56. *ST Suppl.* q. 91, a. 3, resp.

57. *ST Suppl.* q. 92, a. 2, resp.

PART III 

GOODNESS AND BEAUTY *Human Reason and
the True Good*

THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL *Why the
Nonvirtuous Person Can See the Beauty of a Good Act*

The moral and the aesthetic orders are closely related. John Rist's book *Real Ethics* warns us that should the moral order and with it man himself perish due to its abandonment of a Christian metaphysics, based in part on a revision of Platonism, so would the aesthetic order. As he puts it, "With morality, aesthetics will also disintegrate, as it did under the rule of the Nazi 'artist' Hitler, for where there is no God, 'beauty' is a matter of choice and merely (ultimately official) taste. Moreover, in the event of the disappearance of the human race, nothing beautiful would *matter* nor indeed *be*, because it would not matter or be to *anyone*."¹ In his book Rist is rethinking the foundations of morality and offering in the place of modern and postmodern theories of morality a realist alternative, since for him the

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1. John Rist, *Real Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 283–84.

good and the beautiful do matter and are not merely arbitrary as some would have us think.

Among the many interesting points discussed in Rist's book is his account of the best life for both Plato and Aristotle, a life that aims at attaining likeness to God. For Plato, we are to obtain this divine likeness by contemplating, as the gods themselves do, the eternal forms of Goodness, Beauty, Justice, and Truth, which are objective existents and standards by which the actions of both the gods and men are measured. Aristotle, on the other hand, also places man's end in contemplative activity which is divine activity, the activity of the gods, but unlike Plato's gods—each a kind of soul—that may be described as moral agents, the Aristotelian god is not a morally active substance contemplating anything like the Platonic Good or the Beautiful; he is rather thought as contemplating himself. Thus, even though the Prime Mover moves everything as an object of desire and for Aristotle objects of desire are characterized as *kalon* or beautiful, when we humans act for the sake of the *kalon* in our good acts, we are not thereby becoming like gods since Aristotle's god is not a moral agent. Rist notes that acting for the sake of the *kalon* does provide Aristotle with a transcendent good that is the standard for morality and indirectly points toward divinization, but nevertheless does not provide for an adequate account of God as a moral exemplar. Removed from the Platonic moral character of God, Aristotle's *kalon*, according to Rist, "remains a wandering ghost of the Platonic Good."²

Rist questions whether it is possible that the *kalon* in Aristotle refer not only to the act itself and to the final cause of the moral act, but also "to the quality of the *performance* as a whole: both to the character and intention of the agent and to the rightness of what is done."³ Such a reading of Aristotle is not alien to the texts but it is difficult to elaborate, although Rist

2. Ibid., 148.

3. Ibid.

does think that Robert Sokolowski's phenomenological study of *Moral Action* offers a view of this kind that is rooted in part in the Thomistic distinction between the form and the materiality of the moral act.⁴ Rist further adds that the nature of the kalon in Aristotle is largely assumed and that had Aristotle elaborated a more specific account of the kalon, of the "fine," this would have enabled him to explain why we as humans ought to excel in virtue rather than in its contrary. It would seem, then, that we need a better account of the kalon and also of reason. For Rist, "To say that man is specifically rational—which he may well be—will not bridge this gap; we need to know more about the proper use of reason. Without lip-service to the 'fine,' practical reason might be merely instrumental, a means to an end beyond the sphere of its operation."⁵

What Rist calls for requires an ambitious project that exceeds the scope of this essay. My intention here will be more modest: by referring principally to Thomas Aquinas I wish first to clarify the relationship between the beautiful, the good, and the true, and to show the relationship between a true good, what is morally beautiful, to the intellect or to natural reason. Since for Rist both the moral and the aesthetic orders would perish without an adequate metaphysics, I will secondly maintain that there is in Aquinas a metaphysical premise for the operation of practical reason—a premise that is foundational for morality and also for the recognition of the beauty of moral conduct.⁶ Nonetheless, even if an agent recognizes the true good, that is, the good in harmony with reason, his dispositions or character may impede the realization of that true good and of what is really beautiful. Because the metaphysical premise of which Aqu-

4. Ibid. See 148–49 and 149n7.

5. Ibid., 150.

6. This premise is something like the Platonic eternal form of goodness or beauty which the human person participates in through his very rational nature, which he contemplates and understands in a universal way, and which serves as a standard for his particular action.

nas speaks belongs to reason as a law, it is not surprising that the agent's own reason acts as a judge, as it were, such that the agent can know whether or not an act is in consonance with his reason. If the agent acts contrary to reason, he will not only be in a state of discord with himself but also in discord with others and with God. Lastly, I will conclude by taking up once again what Rist says regarding the Aristotelian god and man's end, for even if Aristotle's god is not a moral agent, he can nevertheless still serve as a model for man's moral activity.

AQUINAS ON THE BEAUTIFUL, THE GOOD, AND THE TRUE

I will begin with Aquinas's definition of the beautiful; according to Aquinas, the beautiful is that which pleases on being seen.⁷ Now the beautiful may involve the apprehension of the sense of sight or the apprehension of the intellect.⁸ A beautiful object that is grasped by the senses gives pleasure to the sense appetite, whereas the beautiful that is known by the intellect results in joy in the intellectual appetite or the will. The latter type of beauty is called intelligible beauty, while the former is sensible beauty. Instances of intelligible beauty include mathematical equations, abstract ideas, moral conduct, and institutions.⁹

From our experience of the beautiful, we can say that the

7. *ST I*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1. I want to make it clear from the outset of this section on the beautiful, the good, and the true that I am not attempting to reduce the transcendentals to one another; I am not assuming their identity or convertibility. I do consider, however, that in the moral order the beautiful needs to be explained in relation to both the true and the good.

8. While it is important to distinguish between the perception of sensible beauty and the apprehension of a higher beauty that is nonsensible or intelligible, it is equally important to emphasize that the perception of the beautiful involves both the sense powers and the intelligence, attesting to the very nature of man as a composite. The senses only obscurely grasp the splendor of the forms of sensible objects and present these to the intellect, which more clearly apprehends the luminosity of the forms in and through the senses' intuition. See Armand Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation* (Houston, Tex.: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1983), 35–36.

9. *Ibid.*, 39.

ability to appreciate sensible beauty predisposes one to appreciate intelligible beauty and to admire, for example, the beauty that radiates from moral activity. Although spiritual beauty cannot be perceived as sensible beauty is perceived, Aquinas remarks that spiritual beauty which consists in internal rectitude is manifested in external actions.¹⁰ Even the person who is not virtuous can recognize or appreciate the beauty of a good act; he may not, however, want to perform that good act because such an act is not the object of his will and of his desire. There is then a distinction between appreciating something good as good—admiring its beauty—and wanting or desiring something good. The nonvirtuous person might see Martin of Tours cutting his cloak in half for a beggar as a beautiful or noble gesture but a foolish one, nonetheless. One might wonder why it is that the immoral person can still see the beauty of a good action.¹¹ Virtue is intelligible, it is attractive not only to the good man. As Aquinas says, “Although not all men have . . . virtues in the complete habit, yet they have them according to certain seminal principles in the reason, in force of which principles the man who is not virtuous loves the virtuous man, as being in conformity with his own natural reason.”¹² Since beauty con-

10. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 3. See also *ST II-II*, q. 145, aa. 2-3. Aquinas speaks of virtue, of the *bonum honestum*, in terms of intelligible or spiritual beauty. By referring to St. Augustine, Aquinas also distinguishes between intelligible beauty and sensible beauty: “Augustine says: ‘By honesty I mean intelligible beauty, which we properly designate as spiritual,’ and further on he adds that ‘many things are beautiful to the eye, which it would be hardly proper to call honest.’”

11. In *The Development of Ethics: From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1:191, Terence Irwin speaks of the Aristotelian *kalon* in terms of the fine and notes that the vicious person does in fact recognize fine actions but that unlike the virtuous person “he does not elect actions because they are fine.” According to Irwin, “To elect is to choose on the basis of one’s conception of happiness; to elect something because it is fine is to choose it for itself because of its value apart from one’s own inclinations. The virtuous person conceives happiness as constituted by actions chosen for their value apart from inclination, but this is not the vicious person’s conception of happiness.”

12. *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 3, ad 4. The nonvirtuous person who has the seeds of virtue within him may be attracted to the virtuous person who possesses the virtues in actuality. But it may also be the case, as Aquinas points out, that because a man loves

sists in due proportion and the beauty of moral conduct consists specifically in a man's actions being well proportioned according to the light of reason, and since the reason, like the senses, delights in things that are duly proportioned, the reason even of a nonvirtuous man may well recognize the morally beautiful act as suited or proportioned to rational nature and somehow delight in that proportionality.¹³

Now one may ask why it is that good people who want what is truly good may nevertheless be deficient in appreciating the beauty of a good act. A possible answer to this question may lie in the deficiency regarding the appreciation of sensible beauty. If a person has not accustomed herself to dwell on sensible beauty, to contemplate it, then it is probably more difficult for such a person to recognize and appreciate the beauty of moral action; for the person would not dwell on the beauty of the good act but simply see the good act as a means to her happiness; the person would then see the good in its usefulness to her rather than consider the good in and for itself and thus in its beauty.¹⁴ While an artist, for example, might be more proficient in contemplating the beauty of sensible things and this proficiency can lead to an appreciation of moral beauty, the average good person whose aesthetic education is deficient may not

himself more than another, the other who actually possesses some form which is only potentially in him may become hateful to him. "A man loves himself more than another: because he is one with himself substantially, whereas with another he is one only in the likeness of some form. Consequently, if this other's likeness to him arising from the participation of a form, hinders him from gaining the good that he loves, he becomes hateful to him, not for being like him, but for hindering him from gaining his own good. This is why *potters quarrel among themselves*, because they hinder one another's gain: and why *there are contentions among the proud*, because they hinder one another in attaining the position they covet" (*ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 3, resp.).

13. *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3. See also *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, *ST I-II*, q. 64, a. 1, resp., and *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 3, ad 2-3.

14. See *ST I*, q. 5, a. 6, resp., where Aquinas distinguishes between fitting, useful, and pleasurable goods: "Now those things are called pleasing which have no other aspect under which they are desirable except the pleasant, although sometimes they are hurtful and unfitting. But the useful applies to such as having nothing desirable in themselves, but are desired only as helpful to something further, as the task of taking bitter medicine, while the fitting is predicated of such as are desirable in themselves."

therefore fully recognize the beauty of a good act, although I would say that there is some recognition since as we saw above, man's mind delights in the duly proportioned, that is, in the beautiful. It is also possible that in the average good person there is more inclination to the good, more love of the good, than actual knowledge of the good, although as Aquinas says, "Love demands *some* apprehension of the good that is loved."¹⁵ But our knowledge of a thing or of a person does not have to be perfect; we can love something perfectly even when we do not perfectly know it.¹⁶ By distinguishing between love of the good and apprehension of the good (recognition of the good as good), one can understand how someone in an immoral period of his life might appreciate the beauty of a good act while considering that same act foolish.¹⁷

This distinction also leads us to a further clarification regarding the good and the beautiful. The good is related to the appetite and is often described as the object of desire and of love; the beautiful is also loved, as the good is loved. Aquinas quotes Dionysius, who says that "not the good only but also the beautiful is beloved by all."¹⁸ It thus seems that Aquinas maintains with Dionysius the identity of the good and the beautiful, since clarity and consonance belong to both.¹⁹ When the good is desired, according to Aquinas, the beautiful and peace are also desired. We desire the beautiful insofar as "it is proportioned and specified in itself. These notes are included in the essential character of the good. Whoever tends to good, then, by that very fact tends to the beautiful."²⁰ The proportion or consonance and specification which regard clarity are features both of the beautiful and the good. In addition, the good as good

15. *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 2, resp. Emphasis mine.

16. *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 2, ad 2.

17. See Ralph McInerny, *Art and Prudence* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 75–76.

18. *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 1, obj. 3.

19. *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, lect. 1, n. 266.

20. *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 1, ad 12.

is characterized by its being perfect, in the sense of complete. What is perfect has attained its end, has completed its nature. Perfection is also attributed to both the good and the beautiful. This feature of perfection, when applied to the beautiful, is called “integrity” by Aquinas.²¹ What is somehow impaired, less than it should be, is not beautiful and therefore not perfect. Because of its perfection, the beautiful, like the good, pleases.²²

In contrast to Dionysius who maintains the identity of the beautiful and the good, Aquinas adds a crucial distinction, namely, that the good and the beautiful differ in aspect or in concept. This important distinction is expressed in the following: “For since good is what all seek, the notion of good is that which calms the desire; while the notion of the beautiful is that which calms the desire, by being seen or known.”²³ According to Aquinas, the senses of sight and hearing are in particular related to the beautiful since they are the best channels of knowledge serving reason; we therefore speak of beautiful sights or beautiful sounds. Beauty thus adds to goodness a relation to the cognitive power, such that the good refers to that which simply pleases the appetite, while the beautiful is that which is pleasant to apprehend.²⁴ Aquinas reminds us, as we have seen above, that the good is the object of the appetite only if it is apprehended, that is, known. Desire or love, therefore, requires some apprehension of the good. The beginning of sensitive love is bodily sight, as Aristotle says, and so similarly it can be said that the beginning of spiritual love is the contemplation of spiritual beauty or goodness.²⁵ Consequently, the cause of love is knowl-

21. *ST I*, q. 39, a. 8.

22. See Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, 354–55. See also *ST I*, q. 5, a. 5, where Aquinas argues that the essence of goodness consists in mode, species, and order. The same can be said of the beautiful.

23. *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3.

24. *Ibid.*

25. See *Nicomachean Ethics IX*, 5, 1167a3–5; hereafter cited as *NE*. Aristotle says, “So it seems that good will is the beginning of friendship, just as the pleasure we get from seeing a person is the beginning of falling in love. For no one falls in love who has not first derived pleasure from the looks of the beloved.”

edge, just as the good must be somehow known in order to be loved.²⁶

That the beautiful should add to the good a relation to knowledge shifts then the emphasis to the true. The apprehension of the beautiful is, according to Aquinas, “taken to be something becoming and good.”²⁷ Once the beautiful is apprehended as such, love and delight will follow.²⁸ Since the intellect knows things under the aspect of the true, then we must consider how the beautiful, being good and suitable or fitting (in Latin, *conveniens*), is known. Here Aquinas’s distinction regarding the speculative and the practical intellects is useful. For these are not two distinct powers but rather they differ due to their end: the speculative intellect directs what it apprehends, not to action, but to the consideration of the truth, whereas the practical intellect directs what it apprehends to operation. The speculative intellect “extends” to become the practical intellect.²⁹ By extending knowledge toward willing and acting, the speculative intellect becomes practical. This extension can also be seen with respect to the objects of both the speculative and practical intellects. The object proper to the speculative intellect is the truth in things, whereas the object proper to the practical intellect is “the true as the measure of action,”³⁰ or “the true which extends into the good.”³¹ The object of the speculative intellect, which is the true, thus becomes the object of the practical intellect by establishing a relation with the object of the appetite, that is, the will.³² Just as Aquinas connects the theoretical and practical intellects, he also connects their objects since the true and the good include each other: that the truth is something good accounts for its desirability, and that

26. *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 2, resp.

28. *Ibid.*

30. *In III Sent.*, d. 23, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2, quoted in Pieper, *Living the Truth*, 143.

31. *In I Sent.*, d. 27, q. 2, a.1, quoted in Pieper, *Living the Truth*, 143. See also *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11, s.c.

32. Pieper, *Living the Truth*, 143.

27. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, ad 1.

29. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11, resp.

the good is something true explains its intelligibility. Aquinas thus says, “Just as the object of the appetite may be something true, as having the aspect of good, for example, when someone desires to know the truth, so the object of the practical intellect is good directed to operation, and under the aspect of truth. For the practical intellect knows truth, just as the speculative, but it directs the known truth to operation.”³³

What practical reason considers is an object of desire, a good, directed to action, which has been known. The good, under the aspect of the true, has a relation to reason prior to that which it has to the will, that is, to the intellectual appetite, since the will could not turn toward the good were it not first apprehended by reason.³⁴ Seeing the good and knowing the good are thus followed by love of the good, by the delight that the will takes in the good. Is this not the knowledge of the goodness and spiritual beauty that is the beginning of spiritual love, as we saw earlier? Knowledge of the true extended to the good, of the morally beautiful, is thus an affective knowledge. And thus, could we not say that the true good, or the beautiful, is the object of the practical reason? In his commentary to Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Aquinas says, “The good of the practical intellect is not the truth absolutely speaking, but the truth in so far as it stands in concord with right appetite.”³⁵ And an appetite is right when it is in pursuit of the good which reason calls true. I would then say that the object of the practical intellect which is in harmony with the appetite is the true good, or simply, the beautiful in the moral order.³⁶ However, if the appetite is not right, then the object

33. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 11, ad 2.

34. *ST I-II*, q. 19, a. 3, ad 1. See also *ST I-II*, q. 58, a. 5, ad 1.

35. In *VI Ethics*, lect. 2, n. 1130.

36. According to Aertsen, in his book titled *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, the beautiful is not a transcendental. Its rightful place in Aquinas is as “the true [that] is extended to the good.” The knowledge that is proper to the beautiful is affective (See 357–59). It is interesting to note here that Terence Irwin says the following, “The virtuous person . . . believes that discovery of the fine [or the kalon] is a proper function of practical reason” (*The Development of Ethics*, 1: 191).

of practical reason will not be the true good, the beautiful, but merely a semblance of it, as we shall see.³⁷

THE MORAL SENSE AND THE SENSE
OF THE BEAUTIFUL

Pleasures, Appetites, and Goods

I wish to consider now the difference between the pleasure pursued by the sensible appetite and the delight derived from the apprehension of the beautiful. In distinguishing between nonrational animals and men, Aquinas attributes to men an aesthetic sense, which is not possible in animals, for as he puts it: "Whereas the other animals take delight in the objects of the senses only as ordered to food and sex, man alone takes pleasure in the beauty of sensible objects for its own sake."³⁸ In nonrational animals, the apprehension of their senses only attains to particular goods which are delightful and to which the animals tend for immediate satisfaction. Men, however, are able to dissociate their physical needs from the beauty of sensible things, such that they can delight in those things simply because they are apprehended as beautiful and good. As Aristotle says, men take delight in their senses, and particularly in the sense of sight, not for their usefulness but for themselves.³⁹ And Aquinas, again in distinguishing men from animals as regards their body, says that an upright stature was fitting to man: man's face is erect, turned outward, and not turned toward the ground as in other animals for the purpose of seeking sustenance; having his face erect, man can by his senses and especially by sight "freely survey the sensible objects around him, both heavenly

37. In order to love the true good, the beautiful in the moral realm, our loves must be well ordered by virtue, which is the mean of reason.

38. *ST I*, q. 91, a. 3, ad 3. While Aquinas does not, properly speaking, mention an "aesthetic sense," it is possible to take what he says in the text cited as a sense of the beautiful.

39. *Metaphysics I*, 1, 980a21–27.

and earthly, so as to gather intelligible truth from all things."⁴⁰ So we might say that from contemplating the beauty of sensible things, man might attain to the contemplation of wisdom, in which life there is beauty per se and essentially.⁴¹

Now unlike men, irrational animals are incapable of making the distinction between a good thing and the thing appreciated as good and as beautiful. It is precisely this difference which grounds the possibilities of universalizing, of understanding an action as an instance of value, or of interpreting the present in terms of the future.⁴² Since in the apprehension of their senses irrational animals cannot go beyond the particular good they delight in, not being able therefore to possess universal ideas and more specifically the universal notion of good, they can never be termed intemperate and thus nonvirtuous.⁴³ Animals of this sort are not, therefore, masters of their own actions; they simply follow their natural tendency.⁴⁴ Their sensible appetite necessarily seeks the good apprehended by their senses. In man, however, the sensible appetite "has a certain share in liberty, insofar as it obeys reason."⁴⁵ Thus, in man, unlike in irrational animals, there are contrary appetites: sensible and intellectual. Following Aristotle, Aquinas explains well our experience of this sort of tension:

Contrariety of desires springs out of an opposition between reason and the concupiscible appetite; and this happens "in beings possessing a time-sense," that is, that are aware, not of the present moment only, but of past and future as well. For sometimes the mind forbids a man to indulge a desire in view of what will happen in the future if it is indulged: thus a man in a state of fever sees with his mind that he ought to abstain from drinking wine. But desire prompts one to take

40. *ST I*, q. 91, a. 3, ad 3.

41. *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3.

42. Robert Sokolowski, *Moral Action* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 60.

43. *NE VII*, 3, 1147b5. See also *NE VIII*, 5, 1157b31–32 and *In VIII Ethic.*, lect. 5, n. 1604; and *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 2, ad 2.

44. *NE X*, 5, 1176a10–15. See *In X Ethic.*, lect. 8, n. 2060.

45. *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 1, resp.

things for the sake of “what is now,” that is, in the present moment. For what is here and now pleasant seems absolutely pleasant and good if it is not related to the future.⁴⁶

In this important passage Aquinas argues that rational agents are capable of distancing themselves from those desires of the body that would bring about immediate pleasure, precisely because as intellectual beings they are able to relate the present to the future. Desires run counter to one another when a rational principle and irrational desires are in opposition; there is thus the possibility of conflict between two types of desires: those that are not rational and those that are.

This sort of conflict, as the passage argues, is only possible in beings that have a special capacity for grasping time, a capacity that enables rational agents to refer themselves and their actions to the future. The conflict arises, then, when a man’s intellect, “mind,” orders him to renounce an immediate pleasure in view of a consideration of future consequences, while the irrational desire that looks exclusively at the immediate pleasure favors the contrary action. Given the conflict of desires here, the intellectual capacities of man through their openness to the future can orient the desires in such a way that the ends or goods that man pursues are not referred simply to the present moment, to the immediate gratification of the tendency. On the other hand, if man were capable only of immediate appetites and of irrational desires, then what would appear desirable at any given moment would appear desirable “without qualification and good without qualification,” precisely because the future would not be apparent to him.⁴⁷ Therefore, the capacity that the rational

46. *In III De Anima*, lect. 15, n. 829.

47. *De Anima* III, 10, 433b8–10. In this text Aristotle specifically says, “A pleasant object which is just at hand presents itself as both pleasant and good, without qualification in either case, because of want of foresight into what is further away in time.” I am using the translation of the *De Anima* prepared by J. A. Smith in *The Works of Aristotle*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, 2nd ed., 7 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990).

agent has to renounce immediate pleasure manifests an openness to the future, such that man need not be captive of his immediate impulses or tendencies.

In addition, man's mind enables him to situate the present desire or the immediate pleasurable action in the context of the whole of his life, and to see how that particular action could affect his future and the project of his life.⁴⁸ The conflict of desires and the rational agent's capacity to project himself into the future enables us to see how particular actions are situated within the larger whole of human life.⁴⁹ It is the case, however, that even if the mind does have a sense of time and forbids man from indulging his desires, the man may freely choose that present good which in his state seems "absolutely pleasant and good" to him. Man's passions, his nonrational desires, frequently affect the evaluation of the situation of an act. If our passions were influenced by reason, then we would experience an integration or harmony of our powers; this, however, can only come about through formation in virtue, through reason's ordering of the affective dispositions. Just as science can become an active habit through its exercise over time, so too our desires can be habitually informed by reason. Our passions have to "think," as it were, along with reason, otherwise our knowledge will not be sufficient to act rightly. According to Aquinas, in order to understand, it is necessary that the things a man hears become connatural to him such that they may be impressed perfectly on his mind. And for this to happen, Aquinas says that "a man needs time in which his intellect may be confirmed in what it has received, by much meditation. This is true also of the incontinent man, for even if he says: it is not good for me now to pursue such a pleasure, nevertheless in his heart he does not think this way."⁵⁰ This brings us then to the fact that knowl-

48. Alejandro Vigo, "Incontinencia, Carácter y Razón," *Anuario Filosófico* 32 (1999): 89–90.

49. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204.

50. *NE VII*, 3, 1147a18–24. In *VII Ethic.*, lect. 3, n. 1344.

edge alone does not lead to right action, for irrational desires depend not only on knowing but also on rational desire and so there is a need for moral virtue.

In making reference to the incontinent man, Aquinas makes clear that the man who is in a state of passion is hindered from considering in particular what he knows in general.⁵¹ Such a man will reason not from the universal knowledge his reason possesses but rather from another universal proposition which is suggested to him by the inclination of his passion. Aquinas cites Aristotle who maintains that “the syllogism of an incontinent man has four propositions, two of which are universal, of which one is of the reason, for example, No fornication is lawful, and the other, of the passion, for example, Pleasure is to be pursued.”⁵² In this case, passion hinders reason from arguing and concluding under the first proposition, such that while the man is under the influence of passion his reason will argue and conclude under the second proposition.⁵³ The judgment of reason here follows the passion of the sensitive appetite, as does also the movement of the will since the will is naturally inclined to follow the judgment of reason.⁵⁴ Due to the passion, the good apprehended by reason and sought by the will is not a true good but rather an apparent good.⁵⁵ If the incontinent man who is overcome by passion seeks an apparent good, seeks pleasure, rather than a true good, rather than the happiness that only virtue will afford him, then perhaps it may be said that in the last analysis the incontinent man fails to know what happiness truly is. For Aristotle the virtuous man has this sort of knowledge which seems to be absent in men who are not virtuous.⁵⁶ As Aristotle says, “The good man judges each class of things rightly, and in each the truth appears to him. For each

51. *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 2, resp.

53. *Ibid.*

55. *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 2, ad 2. See also q. 77, a. 1, resp.

56. See Alfred R. Mele, “Aristotle on *Akrasia* and Knowledge,” *The Modern Schoolman* 58 (March 1981): 156.

52. *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 2, ad 4.

54. *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 1, resp.

state of character has its own ideas of the noble and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others by seeing the truth in each class of things. . . . In most things the error seems to be due to pleasure; for it appears a good when it is not."⁵⁷ It is interesting to note here that even if the continent or self-controlled man does the good that the virtuous man does, his inclinations have not yet been habituated to behave according to reason; they are rather in conflict with his reason and thus need to be mastered or controlled by reason. Since the continent man's faculties are not harmoniously ordered, in doing what is truly good he does not experience the joy that the virtuous man knows, for the virtuous man, unlike the continent man, loves what he knows to be the true good.

I wish now to return to the role of the intellect when an affective conflict is given, that is, the conflict between nonrational and rational desires. In the passage cited above (*In De Anima*, 829), the intellect surpasses organic and material movements by looking, as it were, beyond them; as such the intellect measures both movement and time.⁵⁸ The intellect is not confined to the present moment; its desire for the future is a desire for the eternal, and with this a desire for a happiness that cannot obviously be satisfied by immediate pleasure. Both Aristotle and Aquinas maintain that man's intellect is a potency unto the infinite and that the agent intellect which enables us to understand in act is like a light. Happiness for a rational being is this understanding in act, since it is the activity of what is best in man, namely, his mind.⁵⁹ Our intelligence is not always understanding, and so

57. *NE* III, 4, 1113a30–34.

58. *Physics* IV, 11, 219a27–29. See also Jacinto Choza, *Conciencia y afectividad* (Pamplona, Spain: EUNSA, 1978), 193.

59. Regarding happiness, Aristotle says, "If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be reason [also translated as intellect or mind] or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance

we do not experience continuous happiness as the god of Aristotle does. But by nature since we desire to understand, and understand the best of things, that which is most perfect, the optimal, then the intellect of man desires to be in the state of actual contemplation, which is the happy life. So in desiring to understand, the intellect actually desires God.

Now what does this mean with respect to the affective conflict which we saw above and also with respect to our consideration of the beautiful and the good? I will attempt to answer this question by referring to what I consider to be an important text for this study in the *Metaphysics*:

The desirable and the intelligible are found to cause motion without being moved. And what is first in the class of the appetible and in that of the intelligible is the same; for it is the *apparent good* which is the object of concupiscible appetite, and the *real good* which is the primary object of will. For we desire a thing because it *seems good* rather than consider it good because we desire it; for understanding is the principle of desire. And the intellect is moved by an intelligible object, and the order of the desirable is intelligible in and of itself; and in this order essence [substance] occupies the first place; and among the essences the first is a simple and actual essence.⁶⁰

In commenting on this passage, I wish to focus first on the objects of the appetites, for Aristotle distinguishes between “the apparent good” as the object of irrational desire and “the real good,” object of the rational desire or will. It is very interesting to note, however, that in the Greek, the word in both cases for the good, whether apparent or real, is the *kalon*, that is, the beautiful. Since for both appetites, the good must be apprehended in order for there to be a tendency toward the good, the apprehension of the good that pleases is in effect the beautiful,

with its proper virtue will be perfect happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said” (*NE X*, 7, 1177a12–17).

60. *Metaphysics XII*, 7, 1072a26–33. Emphases mine. See also Choza, *Conciencia y afectividad*, 177–78.

one appearing so and the other being really good. For the good person, the virtuous man, “the true and the apparent goods are the same thing,” for there is no appetitive conflict.⁶¹ But in the case, for example, of an incontinent person, he is moved by an intelligible good according to reason, but according to the concupiscible appetite he is moved by an object that pleases his senses, which seems immediately good to him, but is not absolutely good for him.⁶²

Aquinas tells us that this difference cannot be found in the first intelligible and the first desirable good since they are one and the same.⁶³ Following Aristotle who recognizes in the first appetible and the first intelligible the actual and simple substance which is the final cause, the unmoved mover, God, Aquinas likewise maintains that God is the end or goal of all things as the first intelligible and appetible good, in fact, the greatest good.⁶⁴ Because of Aquinas’s creationist metaphysics, God makes everything a participant in his goodness. Aquinas thus says, “Because nothing is good except insofar as it is a likeness and participation of the highest good, the highest good itself is in some way desired in every particular good. Thus it can be said that the true good is what all desire.”⁶⁵ We can then say that the intelligible good by which man is moved according to his reason is a true good, something beautiful, which participates in the ultimate true good, in the supreme beauty, namely, God.⁶⁶ Thus, when the intellect projects itself into the future, recognizing that the immediate pleasure of irrational desire is not in consonance with its dignity as a rational being, there is, as we said above, a desire for the eternal, for the first intelligible and appetible good, which is beauty itself. Only intellect can grasp the spiritually beautiful; the features of beauty, that

61. *NE IX*, 4&8.

63. *Ibid.*

65. *NE I*, 1, 1094a2–3. See *In I Ethic.*, lect. 1, n. 11.

66. *Metaphysics XII*, 7, 1072b30.

62. *In XII Metaphy.*, lect. 7, n. 2522.

64. *In XII Metaphy.*, lect. 7, n. 2527.

is, a certain clarity and due proportion, are found radically in the reason, “because both the light that makes beauty seen, and the establishing of due proportion among things belong to reason.”⁶⁷ The immediate satisfaction of the irrational desire, the pursuit of the apparent good, of the seemingly beautiful, will not therefore be a suitable means for man’s attainment of his final end, for his happiness. As Aquinas says in commenting on Aristotle: “Assimilation to a being that wills and understands (as [Aristotle] shows God to be) is in the line of will and understanding, just as things made by art are assimilated to the artist inasmuch as his will is fulfilled in them.”⁶⁸ From what Aquinas says here, in order for man as a rational being to be assimilated to God, both his will and his understanding must be involved so that God’s will be fulfilled in him. In the case of man this is done freely. In fact, we can say that there would be no affective conflicts, no incompatibility of desires, were it not for election, that is, choice. Both intellect and will are involved in choice. In choosing what is good or bad, what is truly beautiful or not, one’s character is forged, such that the one choosing is always implicated, and so, man’s freedom enables him, as it were, to create himself. When man’s choice is for the apparent good, the seemingly beautiful, rather than for the true good, the really beautiful, then the volitive and intellectual powers of man do not exercise dominion or mastery over sensibility and irrational desires. And man’s natural desire, which is to understand, given his rational nature, is being frustrated, as is also being frustrated his desire for happiness.

When this mastery is not present in our acting, then we experience shame, which interestingly is found in the reasoning faculty. Aristotle describes shame as follows: “Shame may be defined as pain or disturbance in regard to bad things, whether

67. *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3.

68. *In XII Metaphy.*, lect. 7, n. 2535.

present, past, or future, which seem likely to involve us in discredit.”⁶⁹ “All the more so, in each case, if it is seen to be our fault: wherever we are ourselves to blame for our past, present, or future circumstances, it follows at once that this is due to our moral badness.”⁷⁰ Aristotle also tells us that “shame is a mental picture of disgrace, in which we shrink from disgrace itself, and not from its consequences.”⁷¹ Man’s loss of autonomy or mastery, especially when he voluntarily gives in to irrational desires often produces shame; man sees himself, knows himself, to be morally bad. Just as man through his intellect can project himself into the future and recognize the inappropriateness of a certain act, he can also look back on the act and recognize its dishonorable character, and thus experience shame. According to Aristotle, shame is a shrinking from what is dishonorable itself, that is, the morally bad act, and not simply a shrinking from the consequences of the act. When man’s choice, therefore, is for the true good, the good that is apprehended as truly pleasing because it is in consonance with man’s rational nature, then there is happiness, joy; whereas when man’s choice is simply for the apparent good, for what seems good given his irrational desire, then there is shame.

We might also say that in choosing the true good, the beautiful, man himself becomes spiritually beautiful, whereas in choosing what is morally bad, man becomes spiritually ugly and the sight or recognition of that spiritual ugliness is the shame man experiences. And since man’s actions have repercussions not only for himself, but also for others and for that part of the universe that he inhabits, his choices will either add to or detract from the beauty of the universe and his relationships with others. There is, as it were, a rupture that is produced within man

69. *Rhetoric* II, 5, 1383b13. I am using the translation prepared by W. Rhys Roberts found in *The Works of Aristotle*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, 2nd ed., 8 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990).

70. *Ibid.*, II, 6, 1384a14–16.

71. *Ibid.*, 1384a24.

himself as a result of bad choices and a rupture in his ties to others. Among his relationships, the primary one being that with God, for as we have seen, the desire of the intellect is for the eternal, for the ultimate true good, God, Beauty itself. So, in the experience of shame, which is produced in and through our moral consciousness, not only do we see ourselves in a bad light, but there is also a sense of being seen or judged by others in a like manner, and principally of being seen and judged by God. The apprehension of truly good actions, of moral beauty, gives rise to honor and praise, whereas the apprehension of evil acts, of spiritual ugliness, results in dishonor and reproach. That is why in Greek thought what is *kalon* is also what is well thought of, whereas the ugly is disgraceful.⁷² One interiorly judges oneself, one blames oneself for wrong-doing, and one is also open to the blame that comes from others and ultimately from God.

According to Aristotle, the virtuous man rejoices in his good and beautiful actions and is in harmony and at peace with himself, whereas the wicked man is not amicably disposed to himself nor to others. While the virtuous man seems to be a friend to himself, the wicked man seems rather to be an enemy to himself. Aristotle explains this by saying that the virtuous man wishes for himself both what is good and what seems good (this wish for the good is rational desire, as opposed to appetite for pleasure)—as he wishes and does good for a friend—and he does the good for the sake of what is most truly himself, that is, the intellectual element. Since the virtuous man acts in this way, he is not at variance with himself but rather can live joyfully with himself. As Aristotle puts it, “The memories of his past acts are delightful and his hopes for the future are good. . . . His mind is well stored too with subjects of contemplation.”⁷³ The characteristics attributed to the virtuous man are not found in the bad

72. Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 28–29.

73. *NE IX*, 4, 1166a10–26.

man. Aristotle in fact tells us that the wicked man has nothing lovable in him—no good and beautiful actions define him—and so he has no love toward himself. The soul of the wicked man “is rent by faction”: he derives pleasure from certain acts which are not in accord with his rational part, while the latter is pained by such acts. The wicked man seems then to be in a state of internal discord, being drawn in opposite directions, for, as Aristotle says, “If a man cannot at the same time be pained and pleased, at all events after a short time he is pained *because* he was pleased, and he could have wished that these things had not been pleasant to him; for bad men are laden with repentance.”⁷⁴ Interestingly, Aristotle also says that the incontinent man is prone to repent, for the incontinent who has rational desires for some things and appetites for others chooses what is “pleasant and hurtful” rather than what he thinks is good and best for himself.⁷⁵ If we wish therefore to maintain friendly relations with others and with ourselves, Aristotle recommends that “we should strain every nerve to avoid wickedness and should endeavor to be good.”⁷⁶ It would seem also for Aristotle that the man who acts according to intellect, who exercises and cultivates his reason by performing good and beautiful actions, is favored by God and so will be happy.⁷⁷

SYNDERESIS AND CONSCIENCE

In order to better understand why the virtuous man rejoices whereas the wicked man grieves, Aquinas’s distinction between synderesis and conscience, which occurs in his treatment of man’s intellectual powers in the *Summa Theologiae*, will be

74. *NE IX*, 4, 1166b16–29.

75. *NE IX*, 4, 1166b7–10.

76. *NE IX*, 4, 1166b27–28.

77. *NE X*, 8, 1179a22–32. See Michael Pakaluk, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 325–26.

of help. While our rational powers admit of opposite things, synderesis inclines us to the good only, and is therefore not a power. According to Aquinas, synderesis is a habit, although as he says, "Some held that it is a power higher than reason; while others said that it is reason itself, not as reason, but as a nature."⁷⁸ Since reason moves from an understanding of certain principles that are naturally known without any investigation and are thus said to be immovable principles from which the movement of reason begins, then just as speculative reason proceeds from speculative principles that are bestowed on us by nature, so practical reason also proceeds from certain practical principles. Therefore, just as the Philosopher speaks of "the understanding of principles" as the special habit from which speculative reason argues about speculative things, Aquinas too speaks of the first practical principles as belonging to a special natural habit which he calls synderesis, and which inclines us to the good and draws us away from evil. Synderesis thus provides us with a universal and unerring principle. The principles in all works of nature are permanent and unchangeable and "preservative of right order."⁷⁹ The unerring character of the principle of synderesis thus makes possible the integrity of human action. As Aquinas says, "For probity to be possible in human actions, there must be some permanent principle which has unwavering integrity, in reference to which all human works are examined, so that that permanent principle will resist all evil and assent to all good. This is synderesis, whose task is to warn against evil and incline to good. Therefore we agree that there can be no error in it."⁸⁰

Because of the certainty of this practical principle which is like the certainty of the speculative principles, human knowledge participates to some extent in the same knowledge that ex-

78. *STI*, q. 79, a. 12, resp.

80. *Ibid.*

79. *De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 2, resp.

ists in higher substances. What belongs to a higher nature can be participated in, to a degree, by a lower nature. Through the estimative sense, which is a kind of natural prudence or natural judgment, it is said that irrational animals participate to some degree in reason. In a similar way, man's reason may be termed understanding which indicates simple and absolute knowledge, because it participates in that intellectual simplicity by means of which it begins and through which it ends its proper activity.⁸¹ Aquinas maintains the Dionysian rule whereby divine wisdom "always joins the limits of higher things to the beginnings of the lower things."⁸² From the habit of first principles which is a simple perception of truth, the human mind is able to move from one thing to another. The intellectual simplicity from which our reason moves is similar to angelic knowing. Since higher spiritual substances receive knowledge of truth without any movement or reasoning, their understanding, that is, the understanding of angels, is said to be godlike.⁸³ Aquinas puts it in even more emphatic terms when he says, "That something is known with certainty is due to the light of reason divinely implanted within us, by which God speaks within us."⁸⁴

Now how are we to understand this in relation to synderesis? Aquinas says that synderesis is a habitual light that cannot be extinguished from the human soul, just as it is impossible to deprive the soul of the light of the agent intellect, through which the first principles in both speculative and practical matters are made known to us. This light belongs to the nature of the soul and by it the soul is intellectual. Now it is precisely the intellectual soul, the mind, or the understanding, which is said to be formed by the first truth itself, as a copy is formed to the likeness of the exemplar.⁸⁵ The intellectual soul or mind is thus said to be made in the image of God. Aquinas quotes August-

81. *De Veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, resp.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

84. *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 13.

85. *De Veritate*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 7. See also *De Veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, s.c. 5'.

tine who says, “The image of God exists in the mind, not because it has remembrance of itself, loves itself, and understands itself; but because it can also remember, love, and understand God by whom it was made.”⁸⁶ I have cited this text because the remembrance of God, of which man’s mind as image of God is capable, can help us to better understand the notion of *synderesis*, for it is possible to interpret the latter by means of the Platonic concept of *anamnesis*. This concept is also in accordance with a certain biblical anthropology.⁸⁷ In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul says, “In truth, when the Gentiles, guided by natural reason, who have no law do what the Law prescribes, these having no law are a law unto themselves. They show the work of the Law written in their hearts. Their conscience bears witness to them.”⁸⁸ A similar idea can be read in the monastic rules of St. Basil who says, “The love of God is not based on some discipline imposed on us from without, but rather is constitutively infused in our reason as a capacity and a necessity.”⁸⁹ St. Basil even says that a “spark of divine love is lodged within us.”⁹⁰ And since love of God is manifested in doing his will, in fulfilling his law, then the “spark of divine love” means that we have received in our mind—and not as something imposed from without—the capacity and disposition to do what the law prescribes. We can thus say with certainty that one thing is better than another because there is engraved in us, as it were, a fundamental understanding of the good.⁹¹ There is thus inserted in us a primordial remembrance of the true and the good, of the true good, and in this remembrance there is an ontological

86. *STI*, q. 93, a. 8, s.c.

87. Joseph Ratzinger, *Verdad, Valores, Poder*, trans. José Luis del Barco (Madrid: Rialp, 2000), 64–74.

88. Rom. 2:14–15.

89. *Regulae fusiuss tractatae*, resp. 2, 1: *PG* 31, 908, quoted in Ratzinger, *Verdad, Valores, Poder*, 66.

90. *Ibid.*

91. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 8.3.4: *PL* 42, 949, quoted in Ratzinger, *Verdad, Valores, Poder*, 67.

tendency of the being created in the image of God to do what is fitting to God. Man's very being from its origin is in harmony with certain things and in opposition to others.⁹²

This anamnesis of the origin, resulting from the very constitution of our being, which is made for God, is not a conceptually articulated knowledge,⁹³ but rather a certain inner sense or insight, a capacity for recognizing the true good, which beckons the man who is not interiorly divided to recognize its echo deep within him. And such a man will see that that to which he is being beckoned befits his nature (is that for which his nature is made), and he will thus want to direct himself to that befitting good.⁹⁴ We might also say that the true good which is recognized by this capacity or inner sense is a participation in the ultimate true good, as we saw earlier, and thus this inner sense, or moral sense, is rooted in the religious sense, in man's relatedness to God.⁹⁵ To return then to the words of Paul the Apostle, the Gentiles who are a law unto themselves—this is not to be taken in the sense of the autonomous subject who creates, as it were, his own law—but rather that one's own self, one's interiority, is the site of self-transcendence, since it is there where we are touched by the One from whom we originate and to whom we are destined.⁹⁶

So when the sense of the good is not heeded, it is not surprising that the mind should pronounce itself against evil, against what is unfitting and disproportionate to it. Aquinas calls conscience “a certain pronouncement of the mind,”⁹⁷ and

92. Ratzinger, *Verdad, Valores, Poder*, 67.

93. Russell Hittinger, “Examination of Conscience,” review of *The Problem of Natural Law* by Douglas Kries, *First Things* 189 (January 2009): 59–61. In speaking of synderesis, Hittinger says that it is “a habit, rather than a completely assembled knowledge” (61).

94. *Ibid.*

95. See John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1993), sec. 93, par. 1, and sec. 98, par. 2.

96. Ratzinger, *Verdad, Valores, Poder*, 68.

97. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 13, ad 1.

an act whereby knowledge is applied to an individual case, to a particular action.⁹⁸ Insofar as our conscience recognizes that we have done or not done something, then it is said to bear witness to something, to bear us witness. When we know that an act is right or not right, then through conscience we judge that we should or should not do something; in this case conscience is said to incite or to bind.⁹⁹ By reason of what conscience has from synderesis, which inclines us to good and warns us against evil, it is then called “the law of understanding.”¹⁰⁰ But insofar as something has already been done, which is not right, then by examining what has taken place conscience is said to accuse or to cause remorse, because what has been done “is found to be out of harmony with the knowledge according to which it is examined.”¹⁰¹ In this case Aquinas tells us that we have a defiled conscience insofar as we are conscious within ourselves of the act’s wrongness, of its inappropriateness, and thus conscious of some defilement within our very selves.¹⁰² Conscience may, however, defend or excuse when what has been done is found, as Aquinas says, to have proceeded according to the form of knowledge.¹⁰³

That conscience should be mind’s pronouncement concerning something already done, that the mind should think well or ill of what has been done is possible because of the mind’s reflexive character: the truth is known by the intellect because the intellect reflects upon its own act by knowing the proportion of its act to the thing. This proportion can only be known by knowing the nature of the act and this in turn will be known by knowing the nature of the active principle, namely, the intellect to whose nature it belongs to be conformed to things. In

98. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 13, resp.

99. See *ST I*, q. 79, a. 13, resp., and *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 1, resp.

100. *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 2, ad 3.

101. *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 1, resp.

102. *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 1, ad 2 (1st series).

103. *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 1, resp.

this way, Aquinas says that an intellectual being will return to its essence by way of “a complete return” (*reditio completa*).¹⁰⁴ We might then say that the remorse caused by conscience is mind’s recognition that what was done was not in keeping with mind’s essence or nature, that the object of the act was not a truly human good, and thus not in consonance with what Aquinas calls “the law of understanding” and which may also be termed natural reason or the habit of synderesis.¹⁰⁵

Given what we have just said regarding synderesis as a natural indefectible habit containing the first principle of practical reason, which is the first precept of natural law (upon which are based all other precepts of the natural law),¹⁰⁶ and regarding conscience as an act whereby particular actions and intentions are judged according to this “law of understanding,”¹⁰⁷ synderesis may rightly be understood as the metaphysical premise for the activity of practical reason. Due to synderesis good and bad men alike possess the natural rectitude of reason and have a fundamental orientation to virtue, to the true good, the good according to reason, which is the morally beautiful. Synderesis thus combines both the intellect and the will: it is an unerring principle of reason that inclines us to the good and shuns evil.¹⁰⁸ We can also say that even when men and women abandon themselves to passion

104. *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 9, resp.

105. Regarding the experience of remorse, Aquinas says, “Indeed evil men are filled with remorse because, after the impulse of evil or passion that caused the wickedness subsides, their reason tells them they did wrong and they are remorseful. It is obvious then that evil men are not inclined to friendship for themselves, for they have nothing in them worthy of friendship” (*In IV Ethic.*, lect. 4, n. 1818). This lack of friendship for themselves would also account for their lack of friendship for others. Because the sensitive powers of evil men are not subject to reason, to what is permanent in man, Aquinas also says that “an evil man . . . is easily changed and does not have his mind fixed on one thing” (*In VII Ethic.*, lect. 13, n. 1536).

106. See *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 2, resp., and q. 94, a. 1, ad 2.

107. *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 1, ad 2: “Synderesis is said to be the law of our intellect because it is a habit containing the precepts of the natural law, which are the first principles of human actions.”

108. Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 104–5. According to Westberg, “Metaphysically [synderesis] expresses the interchangeability of *verum* and *bonum*; psycho-

or to the appetite for pleasure, conscience through synderesis enables them to know that they are indeed doing wrong; hence, the reason for repentance on the part of the incontinent man and the remorse or shame experienced by the evil man.

To return, then, to the immoral person who recognizes a good act as good, who appreciates the beauty of moral conduct, but who nonetheless considers that same act foolish, we can now say that although the first practical principle is in the immoral person's reason as a habit, which habitual presence enables him to appreciate the beauty of the moral good, this same principle is not being considered actually.¹⁰⁹ The immoral person is therefore unable to make use of what is in him habitually because of some impediment such as his passions or vicious habits,¹¹⁰ and consequently the good act that he sees as good, as beautiful, is not an act that he, according to his dispositions and character, would perform. For Aquinas, "It is owing to the various conditions of men [that is, their character] that certain acts are virtuous for some as being proportionate and fitting to them, while they are vicious to others, as being not proportioned to them."¹¹¹ In order for the first principle of practical reason and all the other principles based on it to become active principles, that is, available to the agent as universal premises for the syllogism of action, they must be accepted by the will "as descriptive of the person's orientation" or character.¹¹² Thus, the presence of synderesis in all men is compatible with freedom of the will, as we have seen in the example of the immoral person, who recognizes the beauty of the moral good but does not want to do that good, because the act is not proportioned to him given his character and his previous choices.

logically it represents the point at which intellect and will are invariably united; and theologically it expresses our participation in the being of God."

109. *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 1, resp.

110. *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 1, ad 3. See also q. 93, a. 6, resp.

111. *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 3, ad 3.

112. Westberg, *Right Practical Reason*, 163.

Synderesis as habitual knowledge of first principles provides, as it were, a standard or measure for right action such that a particular act can be perceived as truly good or not, and admired in its beauty if it is truly good. Provided man's will is not weakened or overcome by irrational desires, the inherent possession of synderesis, of the principles or seeds of virtue that preexist in us by nature, makes possible the acquisition of further perfections, that is, of moral virtues.¹¹³ Furthermore, since the first principle of practical reason contained in the habit of synderesis is a natural law, Aquinas refers to this law as "the rational creature's participation of the eternal law."¹¹⁴ According to Aquinas, this participation consists in the rational creature's having a share of the eternal reason by which the creature is naturally inclined "to its due act and end."¹¹⁵ Aquinas quotes from the Psalmist in order to support his claim that we know something as good because of the participation of natural reason in the eternal reason: "The Psalmist . . . adds: 'Many say, Who showeth us good things?' in answer to which question he says: 'The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us,' thus implying that the light of natural reason, by which we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the divine light."¹¹⁶ It would seem, then, that the recognition of true goods, goods according to reason, which are morally beautiful and which participate in the One True Good, Beauty itself, are known by the participation of the light of natural reason (which is synderesis) in the divine light of eternal reason.

While, as we said above, reason can be hindered from applying the general principle, the natural law, to a particular point of practice because of passion or evil habit, the habit of synderesis, the law of our intellect, can in no way be "blotted out

113. *ST I-II*, q. 63, a. 2, ad 3.

115. *Ibid.*

114. *ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 2, resp.

116. *Ibid.*

from men's hearts."¹¹⁷ This should give us reason to hope that many can still turn away from lives of vice, from their disordered loves, and that synderesis will then become an active principle in them so that by loving and desiring what is truly good—not merely admiring its beauty—they will be able to reach that most pleasant and most beautiful good which is happiness.

Finally, Aquinas's metaphysical premise of synderesis, such as we have explained it here, is the beginning of moral knowledge and action; it thus provides the foundation for morality and for the recognition of moral beauty.¹¹⁸ Reflection on synderesis, on the law of our understanding and on the innate inclination to virtue, will call to mind the further truth that it is the work of a provident God who nevertheless wishes that the rational creature freely choose the true good to which he is fundamentally inclined. Lastly, we agree with Rist that both the moral and the aesthetic orders will ultimately perish without God and without an adequate metaphysics based in part on a revised Platonism; such a metaphysics can be found in Aquinas's metaphysics of participation which sees man as receiving not only his being but also his activity through participation in the being of God. This participation in no way implies a pantheistic identification, since God makes man be a being and an agent that can act freely for his own development and perfection.

CONCLUSION

I would like now to consider once again what Rist says about the Aristotelian god and man's end. Even if for Aris-

117. *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 6, resp.

118. See John McCarthy, "Keeping Up Appearances: The Moral Philosophy of Robert Sokolowski," in *The Truthful and the Good: Essays in Honor of Robert Sokolowski*, ed. John J. Drummond and James G. Hart (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1996), 131. McCarthy thinks that Sokolowski's formulation of the form of the good in *Moral Action* is similar to the universality of the first precept of the natural law.

tole we cannot say that morality is anchored in God, in the sense that God too is a moral agent, Aristotle could nevertheless argue that morality is in effect acting according to reason, which ultimately both comes from and is analogous to the divine intellect. Thus morality, too, would have some analogy to the divine intellect. Aristotle tells us in no uncertain terms that we are like God most of all by our intellect which is unchangeable and incorruptible, and that every man's existence is to be thought of in terms of his intellect.¹¹⁹ The good works of the virtuous man make the man himself good, and so Aristotle admits that the virtuous man acts for himself, not in the pejorative sense of being self-loving, but rather in the sense that he acts for the sake of the intellectual part which principally defines his existence and constitutes his real or true self.¹²⁰ The virtuous man thus strives always to do what is according to the order of reason, since in the life of the intellect consists the good for him. Perhaps it could be said that an immoral person, such as the example given earlier in this essay, whose natural reason not being totally corrupted by vicious habit can still recognize the beauty of a good act, can also recognize in the virtuous man his true self or the measure of his true self. For as Aristotle points out, "Virtue and the virtuous man seem to be a standard for everyone."¹²¹

According to Aristotle, everyone wishes what is good for him and wishes himself to exist such that his identity be preserved. Now the being that remains identical in his existence is God. He possesses the perfect good in himself and wants for nothing. By living entirely according to his intellect and reason, the virtuous man especially wants himself to exist and live, since he is living according to what is permanent in him.¹²²

119. *NE IX*, 4, 1166a17–23. See *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 4, nn. 1806–7.

120. *NE IX*, 4, 1166a13–17. See *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 4, nn. 1804–5.

121. *NE IX*, 4, 1166a12–13. See *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 4, n. 1805.

122. *NE IX*, 4, 1166a17–23. See *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 4, nn. 1806–7.

Thus, the virtuous man is becoming like God, identical in or one with his existence. On the contrary, the man who does not act in accord with his reason finds that he is at odds with himself. When his passions and sensitive powers do not obey reason's prompting, when they are not subject to reason, he will regret having acted against reason and will not be at peace with himself.¹²³ This we saw above in the experience of shame and remorse, in conscience's recognition that what was done was not in harmony with natural reason, and thus not truly good or beautiful, not proportionate to the ultimate true good and beauty. In not heeding mind's movement to the good, which preexists in us as a natural disposition, and which comes to us according to Aristotle "from some divine cause,"¹²⁴ man will not only be at odds with himself but also with God and with others. When man lives, however, according to reason, he is living in accordance with what is best and most proper to his nature; such a life is pleasing and happy, and most like divine life. Aristotle's god, thought contemplating itself, the being that always is one with his own existence, does in effect serve as an exemplar for human activity.

While it is true that for Aristotle man's likeness to God consists principally in the contemplation of truth and thus in the philosophical life, more than in the life of moral virtue, it is also the case that the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life as a predisposition.¹²⁵ Without the moral virtues, our affective or appetitive powers would not be well ordered; the contemplative life would thus be hindered by the impetuosity of the passions and by outward disturbances.¹²⁶ In the virtuous man there is no appetitive conflict since, as we saw above, for him the true good and the apparent good are the same thing. He not

123. *NE IX*, 4, 1166a27–30. See *In IX Ethic.*, lect. 4, nn. 1809–10.

124. *NE X*, 9, 1179b18–31. See *In X Ethic.*, lect. 14, nn. 2143–47.

125. *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 2, resp. See *NE VI*, 13, 1145a2–6.

126. *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 2, resp.

only knows the good that is fitting for him but he also loves it; the object of desire considered by his practical reason is the true good or the *kalon*, which is proportionate to his contemplative end. According to Aquinas, a certain clarity and due proportion belong to beauty, and as he says, “Each of these has its roots in reason, because both the light that makes beauty seen, and the establishing of due proportion among things belongs to reason. Hence since the contemplative life consists in an act of the reason, there is beauty in it *per se* and essentially. . . . On the other hand, beauty is in the moral virtues by participation, in so far as they share the order of reason.”¹²⁷

Moreover, Aristotle singles out justice as the most excellent and resplendent of the moral virtues, for the just man practices virtue not only with respect to himself but also toward others, and this, according to Aristotle, is “most difficult” and thus makes the just man “most honorable.”¹²⁸ Justice aims at the common good and to work for the common good, rather than merely to preserve the good of the individual, is better and more divine.¹²⁹ The practice of justice is therefore an admirable example of man’s striving to be as divine as possible. The divine as ultimate cause of the good serves then as exemplar for human activity.¹³⁰ While Aristotle does maintain God’s transcendence, he also shows God’s connection (as the object of affective knowledge) with our moral world. Unlike Rist, I would say finally that Aristotle’s god is not a mere “ghost of the Platonic Good,” for Aristotle’s god thinks, remains identical in his existence, and procures the good of all—all of which man must do as a moral agent.

127. *ST II-II*, q. 180, a. 2, ad 3.

128. *NE V*, 1, 1129b31–1130a8. See *In V Ethic.*, lect. 2, nn. 908–10.

129. *NE I*, 2, 1094b7–11. See *In I Ethic.*, lect. 2, n. 30.

130. *Ibid.*

MORAL BEAUTY AND AFFECTIVE
KNOWLEDGE IN AQUINAS

In his masterful book *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Servais Pinckaers laments that modern ethicists have lost the sense of beauty to the extent that it is no longer associated with goodness. The Fathers of the Church, as Pinckaers shows, considered not only the beauty of God and creation but also the beauty that radiated from the interior of human persons and their actions. Good actions were also beautiful. Pinckaers calls for a rediscovery of beauty both in ethics and in theology.¹ As beauty needs to be recaptured, so too honesty, according to Pinckaers. For Aquinas the notion of the “honest” good meant moral excellence, the good in conformity with man’s rational nature. Since today, according to Pinckaers, honesty has been reduced to a simple keeping of the law—although popular language does seem to have maintained a certain understanding and esteem for the word *honesty*—Pinckaers advises a recovery of the primacy of the honest good over the useful and delightful goods.²

1. Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 31. Armand Maurer in his book *About Beauty* also points to the importance of Aquinas’s identification of the moral good with beauty; see 71–74.

2. *Ibid.*, 415–17. While the translator of Pinckaers chooses to translate Aquinas’s

The theory of morality that Pinckaers presents lays the groundwork for a consideration of the moral good in terms of the beautiful and for an understanding of the necessity of good dispositions in order to embrace moral truths. Morality is not for Pinckaers principally a matter of obligations and commands, but rather is based on man's attraction for the true and the good.³ In this, his thought echoes what John Paul II says in *Veritatis Splendor*: "Knowledge of God's law in general is certainly necessary, but it is not sufficient: what is essential is a sort of 'connaturality' between man and the true good. Such a connaturality is rooted in and develops through the virtuous attitudes of the individual himself."⁴ Man becomes like the true good, he becomes connatural with it, when there is genuine virtue. An authentic admirer of the beauty of nature and of art, John Paul II is no less an enthusiast of the beauty of God and of the moral life. He in fact describes the moral life in aesthetic terms: "All men and women are entrusted with the task of *crafting their own life*: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece."⁵

In order to recover the beauty and honesty of the moral life and the connaturality which must obtain between man and the moral good, we will now turn our attention to Aquinas and his consideration of the beautiful. While it is true that Aquinas did not write a systematic treatise on the nature of the beautiful, and that when he does discuss the notion of beauty he invariably connects it to questions of metaphysical import or problems of speculative theology,⁶ it is nevertheless the case that he did focus his attention on a particular type of beauty, that is, mor-

honestum as the "honest good," a better translation would perhaps be the "true good." *Honestas* can also be rendered as what is honorable. The honest man would thus be the honorable man or the truly good man.

3. *Ibid.*, 5.

4. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, sec. 64, par. 1.

5. John Paul II, *Letter to Artists* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1999), sec. 2, par. 1.

6. Gerald B. Phelan, "The Concept of Beauty in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Aspects of the New Scholastic Philosophy*, ed. C. A. Hart (New York: Benziger, 1932), 125.

al or spiritual beauty.⁷ Aquinas approaches the notion of moral beauty through the notion of moral goodness and designates the latter *honestas*. He in fact has left us an interesting treatment of spiritual beauty in a question titled *De Honestate* and which appears in his treatise on temperance.⁸ So while Aquinas's position on the transcendentalism of the beautiful—if the beautiful is in effect a transcendental⁹—has to be reconstructed, as it were, from his remarks on the beautiful scattered throughout his works, this is not the case with respect to his consideration of moral beauty. The placement of Aquinas's analysis of spiritual beauty within his examination of the virtue of temperance is meant not simply to focus in a general or abstract way on the notion of moral beauty, but ultimately to especially attribute spiritual beauty to a specific virtue, that is, to the cardinal virtue of temperance. The special attribution of spiritual beauty to temperance presupposes a knowledge of spiritual beauty in general, a consciousness of the beauty of virtue, a recognition that the nature of virtue is to be beautiful.¹⁰ The virtuous man, the morally good man, or the spiritually beautiful man will be for Aquinas the honest man.¹¹

Now in connecting virtue, beauty, and *honestas* Aquinas is following a threefold tradition: scriptural, patristic, and philosophical. From scriptural references, Aquinas draws a parallel between the morally good and the beautiful, on the one hand, and the morally evil and the ugly, on the other hand. He also refers to things that are *honestas*, as those things which are well formed, whereas the *inhonestas* are lacking in form.¹² The

7. Cajetan Chereso, O.P., *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty According to St. Thomas Aquinas: An Analysis of Moral Beauty* (River Forest, Ill.: Aquinas Library, 1960), xi.

8. See *ST II-II*, q. 145, aa. 1–4.

9. See Aertsen, “Beauty: A Forgotten Transcendental?” in *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, 335–59.

10. Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, xii–xiii.

11. *ST II-II*, q. 145, aa. 1–2.

12. See references to St. Paul's Corinthians regarding the comely (*honestas*) and uncomely (*inhonestas*) parts of the body in *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, s.c. and resp; a. 4, ad 3;

Church Fathers, St. John Damascene, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, permit a further consideration of the beauty of virtue as opposed to the “disgracefulness” or ugliness of vice.¹³ And among the philosophers, Aquinas relies not only on Aristotle but also on Cicero. The latter identifies moral beauty with the whole of virtue; in fact, the moral beauty of his just and orderly society is the moral beauty of Aristotle’s good life.¹⁴ Cicero equates the *honestum* with virtue, and the *honestum* is the beautiful.¹⁵ For Cicero human actions that are truly good are also fitting and honorable, whereas base actions are disgraceful. The virtuous life of man will, according to Cicero, radiate beauty because of its order and harmony with man’s reason.¹⁶ However, in this essay I wish first of all to underline Aristotle’s consideration of virtuous action within the context of the *kalon* (the beautiful) as the backdrop for Aquinas’s own thought on moral beauty. And once we have considered the relationship between virtue, beauty, and *honestas* as it is developed in Aquinas, and the special attribution of spiritual beauty to temper-

elsewhere St. Paul tells us to promote the proper, not the disgraceful (1 Cor. 7:35–36), and to do things properly and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).

13. See Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, xvii–xviii, for exact references to the patristic foundation of Thomas’s doctrine on spiritual beauty.

14. Charles J. O’Neil, “The Notion of Beauty in the Ethics of St. Thomas,” *The New Scholasticism* 14 (1940): 352.

15. See *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 1: “Tully says (*De Inv. Rhet.* II, 52) that *some things allure us by their own force, and attract us by their own worth, such as virtue, truth, knowledge.* And this suffices to give a thing the character of honest.”

16. See *De Officiis* I, c. 28, n. 98: “For just as physical beauty attracts our attention because of the perfect harmony of its component parts and is a source of great delight because of their matching charm, so this ‘decorum’ which shines forth in life, stirs the admiration of all around us because of its logical consistency and reasonableness in all its words and deeds” (in *Cicero on Moral Obligation: A New Translation of Cicero’s De Officiis* by John Higginbotham [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967], 73). According to Cicero what is most fitting for man is that he follow his nature and its inclinations—that rational nature which distinguishes him from the other animals. As Cicero says, “Nothing is more fitting than complete consistency of life and individual actions, and this cannot be achieved if we neglect our own natural inclinations and follow those which belong more properly to others” (I, c. 31, n. 111, in *Cicero on Moral Obligation*, 78). In his discussion on natural law in *ST I-II*, q. 94, aa. 1–6, Aquinas was no doubt influenced by Cicero in his enumeration of the natural inclinations.

ance, we will focus on the necessity of rectified appetite for the judgment of prudence, for the practical judgment of the intellect, since as we shall see the apprehension of spiritual or moral beauty requires a type of knowledge that is appetitive or affective. We will then end this essay with a brief consideration on ethical order and its relationship to metaphysical order, since, according to Aquinas, order is the “chief beauty in things.”¹⁷

ARISTOTLE AND “SEEMLY” ACTION

Although the nature of things does play a fundamental role in Aristotle’s ethics and provides a public setting or a common framework in which moral decisions are made, knowledge of human nature and of its good is not the decisive factor in determining man’s choice of the supreme human good. The determining is effected rather by human choice and decision. The starting point of ethics as practical science is in the agent; man is the source of his own actions.¹⁸ The starting point of human action is choice.¹⁹ So, while Aristotle places important emphasis on the nature of man and the nature of the good, the decisive factor in human action is not simply a knowledge of these natures. A man may know what differentiates human nature from other natures and the type of activity that given his nature will result in happiness, but because he is free he may choose otherwise. Man chooses the good that is relative to his disposition, to his appetitive state. The starting point of ethical reasoning is therefore not the good that a study of human nature shows to be the best. As Aristotle puts it, “In conduct our task is to start from what is good for each and make what is without qualification good good for each.”²⁰ Of course, this does not mean that ethics is a purely private or subjective matter, for according to

17. SCG III, c. 71.

18. NE III, 5, 1113b18.

19. NE VI, 2, 1139a31.

20. *Metaphysics* VII, 3, 1029b6–7, quoted in Joseph Owens, “The Grounds of Ethical Universality in Aristotle,” *Man and World* 2 (1969): 180.

Aristotle what is to assure objectivity and universality in making the right choice in conformity with the nature of things is education in the virtues. It is the moral virtues that dispose the individual to make the right moral decision, the right choice. However, although these virtues are oriented, as it were, to choosing, they do not impose a rigid determination, for the determination of human action always lies in the agent, in his power to choose.²¹ One might think, therefore, that if individual choice is determined neither by nature nor by education, by correct habituation, then the individual can choose to disregard nature and his moral education, can in fact choose that which is contrary to what ought to be done. This is not, however, the case in Aristotelian ethics, for although the agent is not necessitated to make the right choice, to perform the good action, he is aware, in his role of deciding, that the good action is the fitting one and what becomes him as a rational agent.

In his ethics Aristotle stresses the seemingly or appealing character of good acts by referring to the *kalon*, which means beautiful in an aesthetic context. While the *kalon* is certainly difficult to explain, one scholarly essay contains the following interesting observation: "One may convey the Aristotelian meaning by saying that the seemly presents itself to the human mind with an obligatory force of its own. The obligation is expressed in Aristotle by means of the Greek *dei*. It is what ought to be, or what should be. No other reason is given by him."²² Virtuous actions are presented as possessing an intrinsic char-

21. Aristotle says, "Choice is the starting point of action; it is the source of motion but not the end for the sake of which we act (that is, the final cause). The starting point of choice, however, is desire and reasoning directed toward some end. . . . Choice is either intelligence motivated by desire or desire operating through thought, and it is as a combination of these two that man is a starting point of action" (*NE* VI, 2, 1139a31–33, 1139b4–5).

22. Owens, "The Grounds of Ethical Universality in Aristotle," 183–84. See also Oscar J. Brown, *Natural Rectitude and Divine Law in Aquinas*, Studies and Texts 55 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981), 20 and 56n63. See *NE* III, 7, 1115b12–13; IV, 1, 1120a23–24.

acter of seemliness and it is this very seemliness that shows the deliberating agent that he should perform the action. Obligation arises solely from the seemliness of the action. All morally good actions, whether means or end, all moral starting points are characterized by seemliness. This aspect is given in each virtuous action, even apart from man's consciously orienting the action to the correct supreme goal.²³

The texts of Aristotle repeatedly present us with the nobility or beauty of virtuous acts, acts that are performed because they are noble, beautiful. All vice is base or disgraceful and deserves blame, whereas virtue is noble and is to be praised.²⁴ Although no further explanation is given by Aristotle regarding the inherent beauty or seemliness of virtuous actions which gives rise to their obligatory character, he is nevertheless aware that each act of human choice brings about something new in the universe. As Joseph Owens has described it so well, each act of choice is "a new beginning, a beginning not determined by anything that preceded it. . . . Every act of choice results in a determination that springs from itself and not from anything antecedent. It in fact sets up on each occasion a starting point that adds to the order in the universe and that was not previously contained in it."²⁵ Because human choice is an intellectual act, it reflects upon itself, that is, it recognizes that it is deciding and that it is the cause of whatever follows; thus, it is aware

23. *Ibid.*

24. See, for example, in *NE* III, 7, 1116a10; IV, 1, 1120a24–25, 1120b23–35; IV, 2, 1122a24–25; IV, 7, 1127a28–30, 1127b1–5.

25. Owens, "The Grounds of Ethical Universality in Aristotle," 177. According to Aristotle, as a man begets his children so is man the begetter of his actions. The starting point of human action is always traced back to ourselves; we are responsible for the scenario, as it were, that we create. To this effect, we will give one of the interesting examples that Aristotle presents: "Let us assume the case of a man who becomes ill voluntarily through living a dissolute life and disobeying doctors' orders. In the beginning, before he let his health slip away, he could have avoided becoming ill: but once you have thrown a stone and let it go, you can no longer recall it, even though the power to throw it was yours, for the initiative was within you" (*NE* III, 5, 1114a15–19).

of its responsibility and of its dignity. Man is the originator or master of the new events that he causes to happen in the universe, events for which he is responsible and for which he will be praised or blamed—all this is spontaneously given to his reflection.²⁶ In making a choice, then, we are engaged in an action that makes us aware of our dignity and calls for a response which corresponds to that dignity. The decisions we make thus call for a respect for the natures of things. According to Owens, “In the responsibility and dignity of bringing a new direction, no matter how small, into the universe lies the obligatory appeal to do the thing in a befitting way. This would appear to be the explanation of what Aristotle means by doing the seemly for the sake of the seemly, or of doing a thing as it ought to be done.”²⁷ Every act of choice thus faces not only the natures of things and the moral culture in which one has been educated, but also the responsibility for originating something new in the universe. Cognizant of this, our act of choice “sees in the proposed course of conduct a congruence that may be termed seemliness, or an incongruence that may be called unseemliness. Inherent in the seemliness appears the obligation to act accordingly, in the unseemliness to avoid the action.”²⁸

In Aristotle’s estimation, the person who will be most attuned to the seemliness or attractiveness of virtuous action and to its obligatory force will be that person whose character “somehow has an affinity for excellence or virtue, a character that loves what is noble and feels disgust at what is base.”²⁹ But this seems to be the rare person, for the majority of people are dissuaded from base action not because it is disgraceful and from a sense of shame but rather because they fear punish-

26. *Ibid.*, 184.

27. *Ibid.*, 185.

28. *Ibid.*, 186–87. For a brief treatment of “seemly” action in Aristotle and moral beauty in Aquinas, see my article, “The Dignity of Man and Human Action,” *Acta Philosophica* 10 (2001): 315–21.

29. *NE X*, 9, 1179b29–30.

ment. Aristotle characterizes most people as living under the influence of emotion, and thus pursuing pleasures as well as the means leading toward pleasures, and avoiding pains. Such people do not know what is truly beautiful and pleasant, since as Aristotle says, “they have never tasted it.”³⁰ Aristotle proves that virtue is beautiful, good, and pleasurable by referring to the judgment of a good man. With respect to this judgment Aquinas makes the following comments: “[A good] man, since he has the right feeling for human works, judges them correctly. In another field the man with a healthy sense of taste will make correct judgments on flavors. But a good man judges that actions in accord with virtue are eminently pleasurable, noble [or beautiful], and good, so much so that he puts them before any other pleasures, beauties, or goods.”³¹

AQUINAS ON SPIRITUAL BEAUTY

Since Aristotle does not give an explicit treatment of the beautiful in the moral order, even though the notion does seem to pervade his whole moral philosophy, we will turn now to Aquinas’s teaching on spiritual beauty in order to complement Aristotle’s considerations of the seemly or of the beautiful in human action. Aquinas’s reference to Cicero enables him, I believe, to connect virtue, beauty, and *honestas*. Etymologically, Aquinas tells us that “honesty means an honorable state,” so that a thing will be called honest because it is “worthy of honor,” and honor is given to what is excellent. A man’s excellence is measured chiefly in terms of virtue, and honesty properly speaking refers to the same thing as virtue.³² Aquinas’s ex-

30. See *NE X*, 9, 1179b10–16.

31. In *I Ethic.*, lect. 10, n. 160. Aquinas says, “Since, therefore, happiness consists in virtuous actions, it follows that happiness is the best, most beautiful, and most pleasant.” Man’s final end, happiness, can thus also be explained in terms of the beautiful.

32. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, resp. In general, when I use the term *honestas* I will be referring to moral beauty, whereas when I use the term *honestum* I will mean the true

planation of the *honestum* has a foundation identical to that of virtue, that is, the *honestum* is desirable for itself (although it may also be desired for the sake of a more perfect good), and is rooted in man's internal choice and thus reflects, as Aquinas puts it, "internal rectitude."³³ We can then say that *honestas* is the same as virtue.

But how is the relation of the *honestum* to the beautiful to be explained? In answer to this question, Aquinas refers to the words of Dionysius: "Beauty or comeliness results from the concurrence of clarity and proportion. . . . God is said to be beautiful, as being the cause of the harmony and clarity of the universe."³⁴ The beauty of creatures is thus due to their splendor and harmony or due proportion, and this beauty is referred to God as its cause. Aquinas notes, however, the difference between corporeal beauty and spiritual beauty: the beauty of the body consists in well-proportioned members and brilliant color, whereas spiritual beauty consists in a man's activities being well proportioned according to the spiritual light of reason.³⁵ According to Aquinas, this spiritual beauty is what is meant by the *honestum*, which he considers to be the same as virtue, for virtue moderates or measures human action according to reason. The virtuous life is a life proportioned according to the clarity of reason, an ordered life, desirable for its own sake; the *honestum* is thus the same as spiritual beauty.³⁶

good, the beautiful as a moral good, or what is virtuous. The English translation of the *Summa* renders *honestas* as honesty, whereas *honestum* is translated as the honest, or simply, honest.

33. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 1 and 3. Virtue is desired for itself, although it is also desired for something else, namely, happiness. In *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 1, ad 11, Aquinas notes that the honest good is the object of freedom of choice: "Our will is brought to bear upon an end or upon a means to an end. And the end may be honorable, useful, or pleasurable in accordance with the threefold division of good into honorable, the useful, and the pleasurable. In regard to an honorable end Bernard lays down freedom of choice. In regard to a useful good, which is a means, he lays down freedom of counsel. In regard to a pleasurable good he lays down freedom of liking."

34. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, resp.

35. *Ibid.*

36. O'Neil, "The Notion of Beauty in the Ethics of St. Thomas," 356.

In stressing that the honestum is identified with man's spiritual excellence, Aquinas refers to Augustine's insightful comment regarding the honestum and true beauty: "By honesty I mean intelligible beauty, which we properly designate as spiritual. . . . Many things are beautiful to the eye, which it would be hardly proper to call honest."³⁷ Through this reference to Augustine, Aquinas wants to make it clear that the honestum, that man's excellence, "consists radically in the internal choice,"³⁸ in internal rectitude, and not merely in something that is external. So it is precisely the honestum, the intelligible beauty of the virtuous man, of the honest man, which may be said to move him closer to the source of all honor and beauty.³⁹

Aquinas thus establishes the identification of the honestum with spiritual beauty through virtue: the well-proportioned life of man according to the light of reason is what the honestum or spiritual clarity consists in. At this point in his inquiry on the honestum, Aquinas makes it clear that the identification of the honestum with spiritual beauty does not confuse the order of finality, of goodness, with the order of formality, of the beautiful. While it is objected that the honestum is derived from appetite, since the honestum is "what is desirable for its own sake," and the beautiful regards rather the cognitive faculty to which it is pleasing, Aquinas's answer removes any confusion regarding the incompatibility of the honestum and the beautiful due to the diversity of appetite and cognition.⁴⁰ He answers the objection in the following way: "The object that moves the appetite is an apprehended good. Now if a thing is perceived to be beautiful as soon as it is apprehended, it is taken to be something becoming and good. Hence Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* IV) that the beautiful and the good are beloved by

37. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, resp.

38. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 3.

39. O'Neil, "The Notion of Beauty in the Ethics of St. Thomas," 357.

40. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, obj. 1.

all. Wherefore the honest, inasmuch as it implies spiritual beauty, is an object of desire.”⁴¹ It is not therefore the beautiful as such that is identified with the honestum, but rather the beautiful as a kind of moral good.⁴²

As we said before, the honestum is identified with spiritual beauty through virtue. Virtue is desired because it perfects man, making him as well as his activity good. Aquinas points out, however, that the excellence of virtue is only fully explained in terms of the excellence of man’s ultimate end, happiness and God. In fact, the happiness that is attained through virtuous actions is described as “the best, most beautiful, and most pleasant.”⁴³ Virtue is ordered to man’s final happiness and it is the latter that gives virtue its meaning, its intelligibility. So if man desires happiness, he will desire virtue as a means to that happiness.⁴⁴ Virtue’s excellence, however, is not exhausted in its role as a means to happiness. In its function of leading to an end, whether its own intrinsic end or the ultimate end, virtue exhibits a rational proportion to the end. Virtue is in itself a consonance that participates in the clarity of reason and thus its splendor attracts us.⁴⁵ Now, as stated above, virtue is desired as a means to happiness, but it cannot be desired unless it is known. In the knowing of virtue, the mind is taken by its consonance and clarity, which are both constituents of beauty. Thus, virtue is apprehended not only as a means but also in its beauty. Since this beauty is desirable to the cognitive faculty as an end, and the honestas of virtue is its attractiveness as an end, then virtue’s honestas is identical to its spiritual beauty. In addition to its goodness as a means to happiness, virtue has in itself an “aspect of goodness,” that is, its beauty which, desirable for its own sake, is its honestas. In

41. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, ad 1.

42. Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, 47–48.

43. *In I Ethic.*, lect. 13, n. 160.

44. Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, 48.

45. *Ibid.* It should be recalled that for Aquinas consonance and clarity are features of the beautiful.

the moral order, honestas and beauty are formally the same.⁴⁶ The formal identity between honestas and beauty is confirmed in the following statements of Aquinas: “The honest [*honestum*], inasmuch as it implies spiritual beauty, is an object of desire.”⁴⁷ “A thing is said to be honest [*honestum*], insofar as it has a certain beauty through being regulated by reason.”⁴⁸ “A thing is said to be honest [*honestum*] as having a certain excellence deserving of honor on account of its spiritual beauty.”⁴⁹

Now in order to emphasize that honestas and spiritual beauty are formally identical, Aquinas raises the question of the relationship between honestas, utility, and delight. He says that the latter are materially the same and formally distinct. The honestum, the useful, and the delightful are found in the subject of virtue and this accounts for their material identity. But virtue has three distinct formalities: honestas, because of the beauty of virtue in regulating man’s life and action in accordance with the order and clarity of reason; delight or pleasure because the appetite rests in the virtue possessed, in the possession of the naturally fitting good, and usefulness because virtue is referred to happiness as its end.⁵⁰ Now to speak of beauty and the useful in the same subject does not mean that beauty is to be used. It simply means that nothing that is repugnant to honesty, to spiritual beauty, can be useful, since it would be contrary to man’s final end, which is “a good in accordance with reason.”⁵¹ When man is ordered to his final end by virtuous actions, then his duly proportioned life according to reason radi-

46. *Ibid.*, 48–49. See *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 1, ad 1 and also *In De Div. Nom.*, c. 4, lect. 5, n. 356, cited in Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*. See also note 15 above regarding Aquinas’s use of Cicero.

47. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2, ad 1. I have enclosed the Latin word in brackets to avoid ambiguity. The following two sentences, which are quoted from the English translation of Aquinas, also place honestum in brackets.

48. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 3, resp.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 3, resp. See Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, 51.

51. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 3, ad 3.

ates clarity. When this ordination is not present, however, neither is the clarity of reason nor beauty present.⁵²

This brings us then to the connection between honestas and temperance in Aquinas. The virtue of temperance is important here precisely because it inclines man to the good of reason and in so doing shares in reason. As Aquinas puts it: "The good of man is to be in accordance with reason. . . . Temperance evidently inclines man to this, since its very nature implies moderation or temperateness, which reason causes."⁵³ Thus, in safeguarding the ordination of reason, temperance also safeguards beauty. Intemperance is to be reproached precisely because it is "repugnant to human excellence," to that excellence which resides in man's reason; it is likewise to be blamed "because it is most repugnant to man's clarity or beauty; inasmuch as the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the clarity and beauty of virtue arises."⁵⁴ Because the virtue of temperance is principally concerned with moderation, with proportion, there is a definite affinity between temperance and spiritual beauty or honestas.⁵⁵

That honestas pertains to temperance Aquinas shows by arguing that both honestas or spiritual beauty and temperance are opposed to disgracefulness and unbecomingness in man: "Honesty belongs especially to temperance, since the latter repels that which is most disgraceful and unbecoming to man, namely animal lusts. Hence, by its very name, temperance is most significative of the good of reason to which it belongs to moderate and temper evil desires."⁵⁶ Since disgrace is opposed to honor and glory, intemperance robs man, as it were, of his honor, of

52. Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, 51.

53. *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 1, resp.

54. *ST II-II*, q. 142, a. 4, resp.

55. In fact, St. Thomas says that "Honesty [Honestas], as being ascribed for a special reason to temperance, is reckoned . . . as an integral part or condition attaching thereto" (*ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 4, resp.). The more necessary something is to the common good, the more one needs to observe the order of reason in its regard.

56. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 4, resp.

his excellence, and of the clarity of reason.⁵⁷ Intemperance is contrary to man's rational nature. Thus, according to Aquinas, "Greater honor is due to temperance, because the vices which it holds in check are the most deserving of reproach."⁵⁸ But temperance holds in check not only its own opposite vices, but also other vices that occupy man's soul when his actions are not measured by reason. This is the case because the passions of the irascible appetite presuppose the passions of the concupiscible appetite.⁵⁹ Hence Aquinas maintains that "while temperance directly moderates the passions of the concupiscible appetite which tend towards good, as a consequence, it moderates all the other passions, inasmuch as moderation of the passions that precede results in moderation of the passions that follow: since he that is not immoderate in desire is moderate in hope, and grieves moderately for the absence of the things he desires."⁶⁰ Therefore, because of the control and moderation that temperance exercises over all the passions, it is an excellent and honorable virtue. In exercising a rule and measure over man's tendency to renounce reason for the pleasures of brute nature, temperance is the so-called point of contact between the animal and the rational in man. As one of the studies on this virtue puts it: "[Temperance] is the fundamental requirement for reason's entry into matters animal. For, while the vices opposed to the other virtues are unreasonable, they nevertheless exhibit something of reason in their very activity—even though this be an erroneous judgment of reason. The vice of intemperance, on the other hand, anesthetizes reason, exercising its activity not only unreasonably, but in a virtual divorce from reason."⁶¹ While intemperance disgraces man and is unbecoming to him, temperance ennobles and "dignifies" man.⁶² It is thus truly a virtue of honor and of beauty.

57. *ST II-II*, q. 142, a. 4, resp.

59. *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 3, ad 1.

61. Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, 59.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

58. *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 4, ad 3.

60. *Ibid.*

Now, as we saw above, temperance moderates all the passions, beginning with the passions of the concupiscible appetite. This appetite, which is distinguishable from the will or intellectual appetite, is man's lower appetite as it is the principle of the natural tendencies which man shares with irrational animals. This lower appetite is meant to obey reason and thus to be subordinate to reason; it is meant to act, as it were, in union with reason; otherwise, the person will find himself in a state of conflict and will not reach the maturity of his personality and the harmonious integration of all the powers of his nature.⁶³ Therefore, when the lower appetite is not ordered to reason, then the integrity of man, as well as his clarity and proportion, and thus his spiritual beauty are at stake. Man becomes less than a man and is therefore ugly. Aquinas says, "Those things which are less than what they should be, are for that very reason ugly."⁶⁴ Temperance safeguards man's integrity, for it "withdraws man from things which seduce the appetite from obeying reason," wherein his integrity and the perfection of his nature lie.⁶⁵ In addition, where the proportioning and harmonizing according to reason are lacking, man will find himself in a state of disharmony. This is the case because matters of temperance are "so close to the fibres of man's being that any disorder in them is a fundamental disorder for the whole man."⁶⁶ In order to thus live a harmonious and duly proportioned life, man must exercise the virtue of temperance. In so doing, he will experience the peace, the tranquility of order, inherent in a temperate life. He will also experience the light and clarity of reason to guide him, for intemperance is corruptive of right reason, of prudence.⁶⁷ The vice of intemperance

63. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

64. *ST I*, q. 39, a. 8, resp.

65. *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 2, resp. and ad 1.

66. Walter Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940), 3: 413-14. See *ST II-II*, q. 153, a. 3, resp. See also Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, 64.

67. *ST II-II*, q. 153, a. 5, ad 1.

clouds man's reason and alienates him from the spiritual beauty of virtue.⁶⁸

Given the harmony, proportion, and clarity that characterize the temperate life, it is not surprising that Aquinas should say that although beauty is found in all the virtues, it is, in a special or excellent way, ascribed to temperance. How beauty is attributed to this virtue is best described in the following words of Aquinas:

First, in respect of the generic notion of temperance, which consists in a certain moderate and fitting proportion, and this is what we understand by beauty. . . . Secondly, because the things from which temperance withholds us, hold the lowest place in man, and are becoming to him by reason of his animal nature . . . wherefore it is natural that such things should defile him. In consequence beauty is a foremost attribute of temperance which above all hinders man from being defiled. In like manner honesty [*honestas*] is a special attribute of temperance: for Isidore says (*Etym.* X): "An honest man is one who has no defilement, for honesty means an honorable state." This is most applicable to temperance, which withstands the vices that bring most dishonor on man.⁶⁹

We can thus conclude that temperance is a virtue both of honor and of beauty. And that with respect to these, temperance is a radical virtue, as it expels that vice which is most destructive of the ordination of man's reason, of his integrity, proportion, and spiritual clarity.

AFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

From what we have said above, it is evident that the right reason about things to be done, namely, prudence, requires that man have the moral virtue of temperance, and in addition, the

68. Chereso, *The Virtue of Honor and Beauty*, 65.

69. *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 2, ad 3. Here as elsewhere (see note 47 above), I have enclosed the Latin word in brackets to avoid any ambiguity.

other moral virtues, for in making a judgment about what is to be done, prudence is influenced by appetite.⁷⁰ Because the appetites seek to possess the object that they are attracted to, the object that, broadly speaking, they love, the appetites must be rectified by moral virtues so as to be oriented to the true good which is in keeping with man's rational nature, with his excellence, and which may thus be called beautiful. If this is not the case, then the man led by passion, by the movement of the sensitive appetite, may choose against the judgment of reason. The influence of appetitive dispositions on the practical judgment is a fact of experience. That a thing appear to us as good or bad will depend not only on the objective goodness or evil of the thing, but also on the disposition of the subject. When we are under the influence of a passion, we will consider things differently than when we are not so influenced. In this way the sensitive appetite can move the will, on the part of the object, that is, through the practical judgment of the intellect.⁷¹

According to Aquinas, passions such as concupiscence or anger will hinder reason from judging in particular what it normally holds in general. The judgment of reason will thus follow the inclination of passion and consent to the object to which the passion is tending as though it were good in itself.⁷² Since prudence is right reason about particular things to be done and right reason requires principles from which to argue about particular things, both universal and particular principles will be necessary for reason to judge rightly about particular cases. Man is rightly disposed by the natural understanding of universal principles, whereby he knows that the good is to be done and evil avoided. But as Aquinas so clearly sees it, this is not enough, for it may happen that the universal principle, known

70. *ST I-II*, q. 58, a. 5, resp.

71. See *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 2, resp.

72. *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 10, resp. In those who are continent, this is not necessarily the case.

by understanding or by science, is destroyed in a particular case by a passion: when, for example, a man is overcome by concupiscence, the object of his desire seems good, although in reality it is opposed to the universal judgment of his reason.⁷³ Aquinas thus asserts the importance of moral virtue:

Consequently, as by the habit of natural understanding or of science, man is made to be rightly disposed in regard to the universal principles of action; so, in order that he be rightly disposed with regard to the particular principles of action, namely, the ends, he needs to be perfected by certain habits, whereby it becomes connatural, as it were, to man to judge aright to the end. This is done by moral virtue: for the virtuous man judges aright of the end of virtue, because such as a man is, such does the end seem to him (*Ethic.* III, 5). Consequently the right reason about things to be done, namely, prudence, requires man to have moral virtue.⁷⁴

It is evident, from what Aquinas says, that when reason is influenced by a passion and evil inclination, it can be so obscured that it does not see clearly. We thus discern rightly or wrongly according to the disposition which we have in affectivity.

What is of special interest here is how the whole person is involved in action. Since acts are carried out in individual cases, the good grasped by the universal reason moves the will only through the mediation of a particular apprehension. As Aquinas puts it: "By the passion of the sense appetite, the cause of which can sometimes be the bodily make-up or anything undergone by the body from the fact that sense appetite uses an organ, the particular apprehension itself is impeded and sometimes entirely inhibited so that what higher reason dictates in a universal way is not actually applied to this particular case."⁷⁵ It is in this way that the will moves itself to the good presented to it by the particular apprehension and thus foregoes the good

73. *ST I-II*, q. 58, a. 5, resp.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 9, ad 6.

apprehended by universal reason. Aquinas maintains, however, that the will still has the power to restrain the passions so that the use of reason is not impeded. Now since the passions can be responsible for a certain bodily disposition, the apprehension of the internal senses, namely, the imagination and the cogitative sense, is influenced not only by the object (insofar as it is good or bad for the subject) but also by the somatic disposition of the subject. In the imagination are found not only the forms of sensible things as they are received from the senses, but also the forms that are the result of some bodily transformation (as in the case of those who are asleep or angry).⁷⁶ The passions thus cause a modification in the operation of the internal senses: we observe that men who are dominated by a passion cannot easily turn their imagination away from those things that so intimately affect them.⁷⁷ So the passion, through the internal senses, modifies the judgment of the practical intellect, which in knowing is dependent on the data supplied by the senses; the apprehension of the imagination, as we have seen, and the particular judgment of the cogitative sense (also known as particular reason, since it participates in reason and is the only sense faculty that directly communicates with reason and even makes particular judgments regarding what is suitable or unsuitable)⁷⁸ are modified by the passion and thus cause a change in the intellectual judgment. Aquinas says, “The judgment of the reason often follows the passion of the sensitive appetite, and consequently the will’s movement follows it also, since it has a natural inclination always to follow the judgment of the reason.”⁷⁹ Since the passion transforms or deforms, as it were, the object, making the imagination consider only the good aspects of the object and concealing its bad aspects, then the apprehension of the imagination and of the cogitative sense, modified by the bodily dispo-

76. *ST II-II*, q. 173, a. 2, resp.77. *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 1, resp.78. See *ST I*, q. 81, a. 3, resp., and q. 78, a. 4, ad 5.79. *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 1, resp.

sition, immediately presents the data to the intellect, which will judge according to what it has been presented.

The importance of the bodily disposition at the moment of the practical judgment is emphasized by Aquinas:

For the good man that thing is an object of willing which is truly worthy of being willed, that is, good in itself. But for the wicked or vicious man that thing is the object of willing which attracts him, that is, whatever seems pleasing to himself. [Aristotle] exemplifies this in things of the body. We see that for men whose bodies are in good health those things are healthful that are really so. But for the sick, certain other things are healthful, namely, those that moderate their diseased condition. Likewise things really bitter and sweet seem bitter and sweet to those who have a healthy taste, things really warm seem warm to those who have a normal sense of touch. Those who have normal bodily strength properly estimate the weight of objects; those who are weak think light objects heavy.⁸⁰

It is interesting to note that Aquinas, like Aristotle, often compares the influence of the appetitive dispositions on the judgment of reason to the judgment of taste which follows the disposition of the tongue.⁸¹ In the same way that taste will discern flavors according to its disposition (whether that disposition be healthy or unhealthy), man's mind will judge the object of his action according to his habitual disposition, since habit (virtue or vice) makes whatever is suitable to it seem good and whatever is unsuitable seem bad.⁸²

Now when the habit is a vice, it will see the object as proportionate to it: if a man acts from the habit of injustice, then what is unjust befits the habit and is pleasant to the man.⁸³ Whereas the man who acts from the virtue of chastity sees what is chaste as good and fitting, and thus being possessed of the virtue judges and decides rightly about matters concerning chas-

80. *In III Ethic.*, lect. 10, n. 493.

81. On taste, see *ST I-II*, q. 77, a. 1, resp.; *II-II*, q. 24, a. 11, resp.; *II-II*, q. 46, a. 2, resp.; *in III Ethic.*, lect. 10, n. 493.

82. *ST II-II*, q. 24, a. 11, resp.

83. *ST II-II*, q. 59, a. 2, resp.

tity.⁸⁴ Where virtue is present, the passion still exists but is now oriented by reason and so there arises a connaturality between the virtuous man and the true good, such that he always judges rightly. The judgment based on connaturality or on virtuous inclination is best described by Aquinas in the following commentary of a text of Aristotle:

The virtuous person correctly passes judgment on individual things that pertain to human activity. In each case that which is really good seems to him to be good. This happens because things seem naturally pleasurable to each habit that are proper to it, that is, agree with it. Those things are agreeable to the habit of virtue that are in fact good because the habit of moral virtue is defined by what is in accord with right reason. Thus the things in accord with right reason, things of themselves good, seem good to it. Here the good man differs very much indeed from others, for he sees what is truly good in individual practicable matters, being as it were the norm and measure of all that is to be done because in these cases a thing must be judged good or bad according as it seems to him.⁸⁵

The virtuous man is thus, for both Aristotle and Aquinas, the rule and measure of human actions, because in each instance he will discern correctly what is good and what is bad; he will judge by way of inclination, by connaturality with respect to the object of his virtue. His virtuous inclination refers to his affectivity, such that the passions of his appetites will now be virtuous passions. Man's affectivity is thus integrated in the discernment, in the judgment by connaturality. His infallibility, as it were, on each occasion in which he discerns or judges correctly is due to the fact that his virtue puts him in consonance with the true good, since the virtue itself consists in this consonance. As may be recalled, we spoke above of virtue as a consonance which is resplendent with reason's clarity and that in the knowing of virtue the mind is taken by this consonance and clarity, such that

84. *ST II-II*, q. 60, a. 1, resp.

85. *In III Ethic.*, lect. 10, n. 494.

virtue is apprehended in its beauty. Moreover, as we saw earlier, the beauty of virtue, that is, its honestas, is desirable for its own sake. Both Aristotle and Aquinas agree that what is in accord with right reason is of itself good. What is fitting for the virtuous man will spontaneously appear to him as good.

The discernment of the virtuous man is described as an intuitive judgment, such as the judgment of sense or as the discernment by the intellect of the first principles of speculative reason. Aquinas thus says, "Just as man assents to first principles, by the natural light of his intellect, so does a virtuous man, by the habit of virtue, judge aright of things concerning that virtue."⁸⁶ The discernment is spontaneous because, as we have said, through the virtue man is in consonance with the good object, which has been perceived, known, as such, and has been immediately grasped as pleasing. When virtues orient affectivity, then the will delights in the good apprehended by the intellect: the will delights in the true good. This true good, the honestum, is the morally beautiful. The knowledge that understands the true as good and fitting is what may be called affective knowledge or knowledge by connaturality.⁸⁷ Delight and love follow from such knowledge.⁸⁸ The object of the virtuous man's affective knowledge is thus that true good, which befits his rational nature and is spiritually beautiful.

ETHICAL ORDER AND METAPHYSICAL ORDER

It is evident, from what we have said above, that the beauty of human acts, which is something spiritual, results from "due proportion of words or deeds in which the light of reason shines forth."⁸⁹ It is characteristic of reason to illuminate and also to order. When man's reason is blinded by intemperance, his whole

86. *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2.

87. *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 2, resp.

88. See Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 357–58.

89. Thomas C. Donlan, "The Beauty of God," *The Thomist* 10 (1947): 197.

life is then disordered. Intemperance keeps man from the good of reason, from its light; it is due to the importance of the light of reason that emphasis has been given to the virtue of temperance. Man's rational nature is what sets him apart from everything else in the universe; through his reason, man is not only *capax entis*, but also *capax Dei*. His reason enables him to discover the order of the universe, that order which is resplendent with light, with intelligibility, with goodness, and with beauty, because it proceeds from the light of the divine mind.

Man's reason, however, not only discovers order, it also makes order. This making of order on the part of reason is what can be termed man's ethical life. Man reaches perfection by ordering his activities according to reason, in such a way that he acts in conformity with his rank or his order in nature.⁹⁰ According to Aquinas, the order that things have in nature, or what may be called the metaphysical order, is "the chief beauty in things."⁹¹ In the ethical realm, there is order also, or at least there should be, but this is an order that reason makes when man disposes himself fittingly and leads a morally good life.⁹² Thus, when man orders his dispositions through the measure of reason, he is complying with the order that God placed in his nature. This order urges man to live in such a way that his higher appetites control the lower appetites,⁹³ so that he choose the true good, the beautiful, or the "seemly." Reason, in deliberating, puts order in the operations of the will and the order from the latter flow into the operations of the lower appetites. Through this ordering man becomes truly master of his actions.⁹⁴ It is in this way that man will bring a new dimension into the universe that is fitting to its inherent order. Thus he will not only perfect himself, beautify himself, but he will also bring about the ultimate formation of the universe, its ultimate beauty.

90. Yartz, *Order and Moral Perfection*, 137.

91. SCG III, 71.

92. Yartz, *Order and Moral Perfection*, 143-44.

93. *Ibid.*, 128.

94. *Ibid.*, 146-47.

ART, TRUTH, AND MORALITY *Aesthetic Self-
forgetfulness versus Recognition*

ART, BEAUTY, AND HUMAN LIFE

In today's culture, which has relativized truth and morality and which has declared both the end of art and the end of metaphysics, we might be tempted to ask the reason for this essay. I do not, however, wish to engage in speculation about what Gianni Vattimo once called the "death of art."¹ I would rather recall what Alexander Solzhenitsyn said on the occasion of his Nobel lecture in 1970. According to Solzhenitsyn, despite the predictions of the disintegration and the death of art, long after our mortal lives have ended, art will remain and it will continue to have a profound impact on human beings.²

The beauty of works of art (as well as other types of beauty) does have a special power which seems to engage the human person more than truth propositions and moral rules do. It is this power or fascination of the beautiful which may have led Dostoevsky to write that beauty would save the world. Dosto-

1. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, trans. John R. Snyder (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 51–64.

2. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Nobel Lecture (1970), trans. F. D. Reeve, available online at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine>.

evsky's words are perhaps now truer than ever, for it is the case that while many have given up on truth and goodness, they remain fascinated by the beautiful. In reflecting on what he calls "the ancient trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty," Solzhenitsyn seems to think that in our time beauty may be called upon to soar to the place once occupied by truth and goodness and thereby "complete the work of all three."³ This is not to say that we should abandon the pursuit of truth and goodness, but rather that beauty may be a privileged route to both the true and the good, and thus that art could be of singular importance in helping the modern world.⁴

The salutary power of beauty and the arts has been acknowledged throughout the centuries. Perhaps no one has spoken more poignantly than Augustine of the significance of beauty in human life; for him it is beauty alone that we love.⁵ This assertion is no doubt indebted to Plato and the Neoplatonic tradition from which Augustine developed his philosophy of art and of beauty, a tradition different from the Aristotelian and yet, I believe, complementary. I would like in the introduction of this essay to briefly consider Plato's account of the origin of man and how this mythological account may relate to the aesthetic experience. In the *Symposium* Aristophanes tells us that initially humans were rounded doubles—double men, double women, or men-women—but because of pride and the desire to be gods, we were cut in two and now we are seeking our proper or other half.⁶ Our deepest desire, then, is for completion and unification; our desire, or eros, is for what is beautiful, fitting, or just right. Each of us is, according to the Platonic

3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

4. *Ibid.*

5. St. Augustine, *De musica* 6, 13, 38, quoted in *The "Via Pulchritudinis,"* post-plenary document of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in *Culture et Fede* 14, no. 2 (2006): 122.

6. The Christian account of man as image whose original is the Word, the splendor of the Father, and who acquires perfection by imitating and uniting himself to the Word, completes the inadequacies of the Platonic account.

account, a morally divided self whose unification will only come about through love.⁷ The spiritual longing that human beings have for unification is described in modern times by C. S. Lewis in terms of the aesthetic experience, an experience whereby we have the illusion of belonging to the world of beauty and are aware of a heightened or optimal sense of self, perhaps precisely of a unified self. When this experience comes to an end, just as we leave the concert hall or the art museum, we find ourselves on “the journey homeward to habitual self.”⁸ As Lewis puts it, Beauty has turned her face in our direction but has taken no notice of us; we have not been acknowledged nor accepted. We long for that “indescribable something” of which the beautiful objects become the momentary messengers.⁹ We not only wish to see the beautiful, we also want to be united with it, to be received into it, and thus become a part of beauty.¹⁰ According to Lewis, this desire for union with the beautiful explains the human condition: “Our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation.”¹¹ The beauty we experience through the arts is for Lewis only an image of what we really desire, and so if these images were taken for the thing itself then they would turn “into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers.”¹² As the image of a transfinite good that will unify and complete us, the beauty of works of art thus provides us with a window onto the transcendent, a glimpse of a beyond to which we aspire and of which the beautiful objects are merely a faint hint. Their beauty thus reminds us that this world—however good it may be—will never totally satisfy us, our real goal and happiness being elsewhere. Of

7. Rist, *Real Ethics*, 95–96.

8. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 11.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 13.

11. *Ibid.*, 12.

12. *Ibid.*, 5.

course, I am speaking here of the arts at their very best and of the power of true art to remind us that we are more than material beings.

My purpose in this essay will be first, to contrast the Platonic and Aristotelian positions on the effects of mimetic representation, that is, I wish to consider how imitation in art can lead us either to self-forgetfulness or to recognition. Second, I intend to show how modern aesthetics, specifically as elaborated by Kant, initiated the separation of art from truth and morality, and how later “aesthetic separatism” promotes a self-forgetfulness or self-alienation which can yet, I believe, be overcome.¹³ As an example of aesthetic separatism I have chosen Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. I consider this work to be of extraordinary contemporary relevance and to highlight in many ways what C. S. Lewis described as the human desire for union with the beautiful. I intend in this way to present what might be called “three rival versions of aesthetic enquiry” and hopefully make clear—or at least allude to—the superiority of one version over the others.

PLATO AND ARISTOTLE ON THE EFFECTS OF IMITATION IN ART

Let us begin by recalling the importance that the fine arts had for the ancient Greeks. Both Plato and Aristotle recognize the profound impact that the arts have on a person’s moral character: the exposure to good art and music serves to predispose the young to the good. In addition, by being exposed to good art the young also become predisposed to the true.¹⁴ In the *Republic* Plato praises education in music as an excellent way of

13. The expression “aesthetic separatism” seems to have been coined by Gene H. Bell-Villada in his book *Art for Art’s Sake and Literary Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 2.

14. See Marie I. George, “The Propaedeutic Role of Music and Literature in Liberal Education,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 46 (June 1990): 177–95.

fostering the good in the soul and of thus inculcating good habits in the young; training in good music also enables the young to recognize the difference between good and evil, between beauty and ugliness. Such recognition serves as an anticipation of, or as a preparation for, reason. As Plato tells us:

Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful, or of him who is ill-educated ungraceful; and also because he who has received this true education of the inner being will most shrewdly perceive omissions or faults in art and nature, and with a *true taste*, while he praises and rejoices over and receives into his soul the good, and becomes noble and good, he will justly blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason why; and when reason comes he will recognize and salute the friend with whom his education has made him long familiar.¹⁵

The rhythm and melody of music that supply us with imitations of different qualities of character, such as anger and gentleness, courage and temperance, provoke a change in our souls, such that we experience the emotions represented. Music has the power of suggesting virtue and love, or vice and hatred.¹⁶ The sonorous and rhythmic imitation of ordered emotions will both calm and delight the emotions of the young, at an age where emotions are yet undisciplined and thus where rectification of the movements of the sensitive appetite is especially needed.¹⁷ Unruly music, by contrast, will provoke and foster disorderly emotions, not directed to the true good. A child who

15. Plato, *Republic* III, 402a, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924). Emphasis mine.

16. Marie I. George, "Aristotle on Music and Virtue in the Polis," presentation given at meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy at SUNY Binghamton (October 1994), 6.

17. See Jasmin Boulay, "Le Rôle de la musique dans l'éducation," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 17 (1961): 262–74.

becomes habituated to ugly and disordered music will find such music normal and agreeable, because it is in consonance with the habit which has become a second nature; having reached the age at which he should be able to recognize and judge the music as disordered, he will find it difficult to do so, since his habit and reason will be at odds with each other.¹⁸ Hence the importance of good music in the education of the young, since it introduces in the sensitive appetite an affective disposition to the good of virtue, a love for the good of reason.

Now if in the *Republic* good music is seen as pedagogically efficacious, this is certainly not the case with poetry. In general, Plato's censure of the poets, their expulsion from the state, is well known, but what is of particular interest is that his concern is for the care of the soul, for the unity of the self rather than its division, a unity which as we saw in the introduction, will only come about through love of what is fitting. When sophism penetrates the realm of education and the spirit of the state, then the poets themselves become sophists who produce false appearances of things and corrupt the soul as a consequence of their deceit. The poet not only creates doubts about what is real, but also stirs up volatile human passions, and in so doing alienates the spectator from himself.¹⁹ When in dramatic poetry what is represented is delusion and erratic passion, then the spectator who is seduced, as it were, by the representation finds himself in a state of self-forgetfulness or self-alienation: he turns away from his inner self and yields to the emotions of another.²⁰ Such a state is far from the inner harmony of the soul

18. George, "Aristotle on Music and Virtue in the Polis," 7.

19. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Plato and the Poets," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 46.

20. *Ibid.*, 64. In the title of this chapter I use the expression "aesthetic self-forgetfulness." I have found the notion of self-forgetfulness in Gadamer when he speaks of the self-alienation of the spectator, an alienation or estrangement that occurs when the spectator is seduced by the falsehood and the violent passions evoked in dramatic poetry. I have found the term useful in order to juxtapose it to Aristotelian recognition.

which Plato's ideal for education intended to promote, a harmony whereby the spirited and softer elements would be ruled by reason, and justice achieved in the soul of the individual and reproduced in the city-state. Justice, according to Plato, is concerned not with the outward man but rather with the inward self which is the true self. As Plato puts it: "The just man does not permit the several elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of the others: he sets in order his own inner life and is his own master and his own law, and is at peace with himself."²¹ The virtuous and just man is the one whose life is healthy and beautiful, and such a life contributes to the harmony of the state. Out of concern then for the condition of one's soul, Plato advocates that we rid ourselves of a love that is not good for us—the love of the deceptive appearances of things produced by the poets—and turn instead to the love of wisdom, for philosophy alone will enable the soul to attain self-knowledge and to behold the truth. It would seem then that the censure of dramatic poetry in Plato's ideal state is necessary if we are to see and love what is fitting, true Being, Beauty, and the Good.

Because the desire to know and to see can be unphilosophical as well as philosophical, Plato's critique of poetry is meant, I believe, to warn us against diversion in what will dullen reason so that recognition of the true from the false would not be possible. The lover of what merely attracts the senses is, according to Plato, a dreamer who puts the copy in the place of the original or of the real object.²² And so Plato tells us, "The lovers of sounds and sights . . . are . . . fond of fine tones and colors and forms and all the artificial products that are made out of them, but their mind is incapable of seeing or loving absolute beauty."²³ Only the philosopher is able to recognize the exist-

21. Plato, *Republic* IV, 443d.

22. See Gadamer, "Plato's Educational State," in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 90–91.

23. Plato, *Republic* V, 476b.

tence of absolute beauty and distinguish the idea from the copy. It is not surprising then that Plato should have addressed the “ancient quarrel” between poetry and philosophy.²⁴ Philosophy alone enables us to see true Being; only philosophy will save the state.

If Plato condemns art on the basis of its being removed from truth, Aristotle on the contrary holds that art is more philosophical than history. In the *Republic* artistic imitation is portrayed basically as a copy, which falsifies the real things being copied. Aristotle denies the Platonic notion of imitation as copying and maintains rather that well-executed imitative works reveal a necessary or probable relation between character and action, between character and destiny, or that they make known a kind or a type, that for example a particular man in a tragic drama is a kind of man. Aristotle’s interest then is not so much in external representation as it is in internal representation: external representation is the relationship of likeness which holds between a statue and its subject; when the statue is compared to the subject and found to be a faithful representation of the subject, it is said to be a *true* likeness.²⁵ For Aristotle a work of art communicates to the spectator certain general qualities of the subject, the subject’s character; what is thus communicated is the universal in the particular. Internal representation does not therefore refer us to an “original,” to an external model, as it were; it is rather by means of the representation itself that we come to see and know what is represented. The world of the work of art unveils or reveals truth to us, and thus truth is a property not only of external representation but of internal representation as well.

We learn then about the kind of men depicted, for example, in Rembrandt’s portraits without ever having seen the origi-

24. *Republic* X, 607b.

25. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Contexts of Interpretation: Reflections on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*,” *Boston University Journal* 26 (1980): 175–76.

nals. And this learning is, according to Aristotle, pleasurable. We delight to view in art accurate representations of things which we would be pained to experience in real life; it is paradoxical that we should experience a sort of pleasure from the witnessing and knowing of painful things, but this is in great part what occurs to us as we view a tragic drama.²⁶ Aristotle tells us why this is so:

The cause of this is that the act of learning is not only the most pleasant to philosophers but, in a similar way, to other men as well, only they have an abbreviated share in this pleasure. Thus men find pleasure in viewing representations because it turns out that they learn and infer what each thing is—for example, that this particular object is that kind of object; since if one has not happened to see the object previously, he will not find any pleasure in the imitation *qua* imitation but rather in the workmanship or coloring or something similar.²⁷

The pleasure derived from an imitative work does not come therefore from a comparison of the work to an original; the pleasure of learning is caused rather by the artist's skill, by his skillful use of colors or words, by a fitting arrangement of parts, and the "proper magnitude" of action.²⁸ If the imitative work is well done, the spectator learns: he comes to know universals and to perceive the relationship of the particulars to the uni-

26. Leon Golden, trans., and O. B. Hardison, Jr., commentary, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 92.

27. Aristotle, *Poetics* IV, 1448b10–19.

28. *Poetics* V, 1449b4–6. In VI, 1450b18–23 Aristotle speaks of the elements that are necessary for instances of beauty both in nature and in art: "For beauty to exist, both in regard to a living being and in regard to any object that is composed of separate parts, not only must there be a proper arrangement of the component elements, but the object must also be of a magnitude that is not fortuitous. For beauty is determined by magnitude and order;" and in VII, 1451a30–34, "Just as it is necessary in regard to bodies and animals for there to be a proper magnitude—and this is the length that can easily be perceived at a glance—thus, also, there must be a proper length in regard to plots, and this is one that can be easily taken in by the memory." Aristotle ends by saying, "To give a general rule, we say that whatever length is required for a change to occur from bad fortune to good or from good fortune to bad through a series of incidents that are in accordance with probability or necessity, is a sufficient limit of magnitude" (VII, 1451a43–47).

versals, and this learning is pleasurable. It is important to note here that for Aristotle the pleasure derived from works of art is not mere sense-gratification but rather intellectual enjoyment. Let us consider an example from music: while both non-rational and rational animals enjoy listening to music, human beings can in addition appreciate music in an intellectual way, that is, by discerning in the music what emotions and qualities of character are being represented, how the themes like the plot in a novel are being developed and concluded.²⁹ Imitative works for Aristotle are thus not for mere amusement or play but rather for moral education and for intellectual enjoyment.

In addition to asserting that imitative art does not produce pleasure in general but rather pleasure associated with learning, which is enjoyed by philosophers and non-philosophers alike, Aristotle also writes of the cathartic function of tragedy. He says, "Tragedy . . . achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents."³⁰ While the meaning of catharsis is not easy to determine, it is possible to consider catharsis within the framework of the end or purpose of imitative art. Catharsis may be interpreted in terms of clarification, that is, "intellectual clarification."³¹ Such an interpretation seems to be in consonance with the aim of the imitative process which for Aristotle is total intelligibility. The tragic poet presents pitiable or fearful incidents in order to bring out the probable or necessary principles that unite them in the action of the tragedy, and that determine their relation to the action or process of change that takes place from the beginning to the end of the tragedy.³² The spectator who views such a tragedy will discover a relationship between the incidents and the universal elements embodied in them. In

29. George, "Aristotle on Music and Virtue in the Polis," 3.

30. *Poetics* V, 1449b9–11.

31. See Golden and Hardison, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 133 and 294.

32. *Ibid.*, 295.

this way, the work of art will have become intelligible for the spectator: he will understand the parts and their relation to the whole; he will thus understand the essence of the tragedy as an ordered whole. This process of understanding or of recognition which takes place in the spectator has been, I believe, best described by Hans-Georg Gadamer when he speaks of the Aristotelian doctrine of art as recognition. Gadamer says, "It is part of the process of recognition that we see things in terms of what is permanent and essential in them, unencumbered by the contingent circumstances in which they were seen before and are seen again. This is what constitutes recognition and contributes to the joy we take in imitation. For what imitation reveals is precisely the real essence of the thing."³³

The "intellectual clarification" which tragedy achieves thus enables the spectator to engage in the life of mind, in understanding, which for Aristotle is also divine activity, and which he describes as the best and pleasantest life, the life of happiness. It is not surprising then that the intellectual enjoyment which we experience through the arts should be, as it were, an anticipation of the happiness and perfection which awaits us as rational beings, a happiness earlier described in this paper through C. S. Lewis's account of the aesthetic experience. Aristotle himself tells us that "intellectual enjoyment is universally acknowledged to contain an element not only of the noble but of the pleasant, for happiness is made of both."³⁴

Now the "clarification" interpretation just given of catharsis is not, in my opinion, opposed to the purification theory, that is, that the emotions of pity or fear are to be purified or trained in such a way that they are not an obstacle to the intellect. If we

33. Gadamer, "Art and Imitation," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 99.

34. *Politics* VIII, 5, 1339b15-20. I am making use of the translation by Benjamin Jowett in *The Works of Aristotle*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), 8.

do not master our emotions, then we will be unable to listen to reason. When reason is overcome by passion, no knowledge or learning is really possible. Aristotle does not want to “drive out” the emotions, as Plato had done with the poets, but rather educate them in such a way that they are at the service of reason. An example of moral education through the arts has already been given in our discussion of appropriate music for children.

Whether through recognition of the essential or through purification of the emotions, our encounter with works of art transforms us. Understanding of what is other than the self brings with it self-understanding. Recognition is also self-recognition. The actions that take place in a tragic drama are seen as continuous with what occurs in our own world, in reality. There is continuity between what happens in the work of art and our ordinary life; art is thus not separated from the truth. The spectator’s encounter with a tragic drama, for example, enables him to return to himself, as it were, to recognize a metaphysical order of being that is true for everyone and to arrive at a more adequate understanding of his own existence. In and through the tragic drama, the spectator sees that “this is how it is,” and such an affirmation is “a kind of self-knowledge for the spectator, who emerges with new insight from the illusions in which he, like everyone else, lives.”³⁵ Unlike Plato, then, who sees in poetic drama a source of illusion and falsehood, Aristotle maintains that art and philosophy are not mutually exclusive; so for him poetry is indeed more philosophical than history.

MODERN AESTHETICS AS PRECURSOR OF AESTHETIC SEPARATISM

While the Ancients, as we have seen, were concerned with the relation of art and of the beautiful to the true and the good,

35. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989, 2nd rev. ed.), 132.

to the training of the appetitive part in man for the sake of reason and to the cultivation of the mind through well-executed works, a new aesthetic developed in the eighteenth century which initiated the separation of the aesthetic experience from cognitive and moral concerns. Immanuel Kant's writings in the area of aesthetics paved the way for aesthetic separatism, for the autonomy of aesthetics from the spheres of knowledge and morality.³⁶

According to Kant, the pleasure experienced in the judgment of beautiful forms is non-conceptual and subjective. He describes the pleasure that results from the contemplation of beautiful forms as "a disinterested and *free* satisfaction, for no interest, either of sense or of reason, forces our assent."³⁷ Thus, there is no concept or purpose to be served by the beautiful object. The aesthetic judgment in Kant is not concerned with the intrinsic properties of the object judged but rather only with the judging itself. When we judge that a certain object or form is beautiful, we are referring to the appreciation of the suitability of the form for the play of our cognitive powers with it. As Kant says, "The cognitive powers, [imagination and understanding], which are involved by [the representation of an object], are here in free play, because no definite concept limits them to a definite rule of cognition."³⁸ The pleasure that is experienced due to the free play and the harmony of the cognitive faculties in the representation is, according to Kant, necessarily imputed to everyone since the faculties are the same in all rational beings.³⁹

Although the aesthetic judgment is subjective in the sense

36. See Jean Grondin, "Gadamer's Aesthetics. The Overcoming of Aesthetic Consciousness and the Hermeneutical Truth of Art," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2: 267–71.

37. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), sec. 5 of the "Analytic of the Beautiful," 44.

38. *Ibid.*, sec. 9, 52.

39. *Ibid.*, sec. 9, 53.

that it refers to the subjective pleasure in a form, it is nevertheless universally communicable. The aesthetic judgment or the judgment of taste presupposes for Kant the existence of “a subjective principle which determines what pleases or displeases only by feeling and not by concepts, but yet with universal validity.”⁴⁰ Kant calls this principle a common sense, not an external sense, nor a common understanding, but as he puts it, “the effect resulting from the free play of our cognitive powers.”⁴¹ In every judgment of taste whereby an object is described as beautiful, the judgment is grounded not on private feeling but rather on a common feeling. For Kant, then, the judgment of taste which admits the universal communicability of a feeling is a kind of common sense and, in fact, the only such sense that rational beings have.

As Gadamer points out, Kant’s account of taste, of what he considers to be the true common sense, is far from the classical-humanist tradition which assigned to taste, as we saw in Plato, a significant role in moral education since it was considered a help in creating a moral disposition through the refinement of the inclinations.⁴² The education of taste was for the Ancients an important element of the moral-political formation of character. Taste can also be considered a special way of knowing which for both Plato and Aristotle anticipates and prepares the way for reason. According to Gadamer, in the area of morality taste is related to prudential judgment and can be connected to the ethics of measure in Plato or the ethics of the mean in Aristotle. Kant’s reduction of the moral significance of taste reminds us that his morality has no basis in human nature and its inclinations, but rather in the freedom or autonomy of rational beings who utter moral commands to themselves. Therefore, the narrowing of taste, of the common sense, to the aesthetic

40. *Ibid.*, sec. 20, 75.

41. *Ibid.*

42. See Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, 35–40.

judgment in Kant is decisive for both his aesthetics and his morality.⁴³ Kant's aesthetics thus provides the basis for the independence of the beautiful from both the true and the good, although Kant himself still held that the beautiful was related to our moral destiny.

Furthermore, for Kant the beautiful is not regarded, as it had been in ancient and also in medieval thought, as the manifestation of an order that always exists and to which human reason can ascend. For Kant the beautiful points rather toward the order of human reason and creativity. Kant's aesthetics of genius exalts human freedom; the work of genius manifests the enigmatic human power to create something new. The work of art is thus not referred to the spectator's self-discovery and instruction as in the Ancients, but rather to the experiences of the art work's free creator. It is no wonder, then, that after Kant the notion of the genius becomes central to aesthetics and that society generally adopts a cult of genius, which celebrates man's freedom as the capacity to make himself.⁴⁴

OSCAR WILDE AND ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Kant's aesthetics has come to be viewed as the sourcebook for Art for Art's Sake, whose brilliant publicist Oscar Wilde claims that aesthetics supersedes ethics and thus that beauty matters more than ethics. In this, Wilde was influenced by Walter Pater who is the thinker most frequently associated with late-Victorian aestheticism and for whom all the aspects of human life were to be subsumed to the criteria of beauty, even morality. According to Pater the relationship of art and beauty to truth or experience is of no interest to the critic, and works of art are simply "powers or forces" which produce unique "plea-

43. Richard L. Velkley, "Gadamer and Kant: The Critique of Modern Aesthetic Consciousness in *Truth and Method*," *Interpretation* 9 (1981): 360.

44. *Ibid.*, 362.

surable sensations” in the observer.⁴⁵ While Kant attempted to establish an objective grounding for subjective taste, for the subjective pleasure experienced in beautiful forms, art is reduced in Pater to the private realm of inner sensations. Pater’s work thus declares the independence of art from the true and the good. As he puts it: “Art is always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material.”⁴⁶ Pater’s aestheticist and formalist ideas influenced not only Oscar Wilde, but also the work of contemporary new critics and deconstructionists for whom form and language are more important than propositional content and human reference. In the conclusion to his studies on the Renaissance, Pater adopts a hedonism in life as well as in art. He says,

We are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve. . . . We have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among “the children of this world,” in art and song. . . . Of such wisdom the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake.⁴⁷

It is evident that Pater presents us with a new sort of “wisdom,” very different from that of the Ancients, for whom the pleasure afforded by the arts was not to remain simply at the level of the senses but rather was to provide us with intellectual pleasure as well, what Aristotle refers to as the pleasure of learning.

Following in Pater’s footsteps, it is not surprising then that Oscar Wilde places the sense of beauty above reason and our

45. Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, in Bell-Villada’s *Art for Art’s Sake and Literary Life*, 78.

46. *Ibid.*, 79.

47. Pater, Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, in Donald L. Lawler, ed., A Norton Critical Edition of Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 312.

other faculties; for Wilde the beauty-sense is more important than the sense of right and wrong.⁴⁸ He identifies himself with the *poètes maudits* for whom the whole of life is the quest for new experiences and for whom the aesthetic experience producing “extraordinary sensations” had become an end in itself.⁴⁹ The artist thus embodies an individualism which desires to be rid of limitations, of subjection to norms and rules, in order to liberate personality. According to Wilde, “in art there is no such thing as universal truth.”⁵⁰ He in fact says that “lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art.”⁵¹ He also says that “All art is immoral.”⁵² These are no doubt the claims of an iconoclast, a Nietzschean in the world of art and literature. But what is interesting to see is that his claims do not hold and that in fact the “art for art’s sake” philosophy seems to subvert itself. Through a brief look at Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray*, I hope to make this clear.

In the preface Wilde adopts an amoral stance toward literature, and yet his novel seems to tell us just the opposite. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is in many ways an inversion of common sense and of the desire for what is beautiful or fitting. Beauty is described as “a form of Genius,” whose true mystery resides not in the invisible but in the visible.⁵³ As I noted in the beginning of this essay, we seem to be incomplete selves who seek completion or unification through the love of what is beautiful or just right. The portrait in this novel makes Dorian Gray long for the beauty and newness of unending youth. He in fact identifies himself with the beauty portrayed in the painting as though his self could be reduced to the physical beauty he possesses. Dorian Gray becomes a sort of Faustian character, who in a

48. Oscar Wilde, *Intentions*, in Richard Ellmann, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 394–95.

49. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 162.

50. Wilde, *Intentions*, 432.

51. *Ibid.*, 320.

52. *Ibid.*, 380.

53. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 23.

sense sells his soul in order to be forever young and beautiful. As Dorian says, "If it were I who was always to be young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that . . . I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!"⁵⁴ The beauty that Dorian perceives in the portrait is mistaken for beauty itself, and so he begins to idolize beauty. He desires to be united with the beautiful, and yet he has reduced beauty to mere appearances and thus to the physical; he is enamored of his own beauty. As he puts it: "I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait . . . painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now!"⁵⁵ Dorian thus resembles the Platonic "dreamer," the lover of what attracts the senses, incapable of seeing what the image points to. Of course, what seems at first to be a mere wish becomes a conscious choice, or at least the lot to which he succumbs because of his insatiable desire for pleasures—not happiness—and his "infinite curiosity about life,"⁵⁶ a curiosity which is a perversion of the philosophical desire to know, that unphilosophical desire for knowledge of which Plato warns us. Dorian was to have "eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins," and "the portrait was to bear the burden of his shame."⁵⁷

Life becomes for Dorian an art; he stylizes his life, fabricating an artificial self. In his attempt to live the life of aesthetic pleasures he is influenced by a book, which in great part is responsible for his perversion.⁵⁸ Despite Wilde's stance regarding the amorality of literature, he nonetheless recognizes the poi-

54. *Ibid.*, 26.55. *Ibid.*56. *Ibid.*, 83.57. *Ibid.*58. The book referred to in the novel is J. K. Huysmans's *A Rebours*. Huysmans combined romanticism with contempt for realism and middle-class values.

son that can be contained in a book, a book whose hero was to serve as a model for what Dorian was to become. As Wilde so graphically puts it: "The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book."⁵⁹ Dorian's life was to imitate that book. The art he engages in, producing ever new sensations, makes him forgetful of his true self. What he comes to love is not good for his inner self, and so as he converts his life into an art he seems to sink into despair and seeks further forgetfulness in opium dens. Dorian thus personifies the contemporary hypertrophy of the external man to the detriment of the inner man. But even though the inner man or the true self can be weakened, it cannot be totally eclipsed, which is no doubt the significance of the portrait which bears the shame of his sins. The portrait becomes the personification of his soul, "calling him to judgment."⁶⁰ Once he coveted the beauty of the portrait, now he loathes its ugliness.

Dorian's initial desire for union with the beautiful, his longing for love, cannot be satisfied or fulfilled by love for the aesthetic creation he becomes, by love for the self that he fabricates. He painfully tells us: "I wish I could love. But I seem to have lost the passion, and forgotten the desire. I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has become a burden for me. I want to escape, to go away, to forget."⁶¹ Dorian's life of extreme individualism and hedonism has alienated him from his true self. He seems to be no longer in possession of himself, no longer free. And yet there occurs a moment of what may be termed a reversal in the novel, where Dorian appears to recognize his true self through love for a simple village girl. In

59. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 98.

60. *Ibid.*, 93.

61. *Ibid.*, 156.

her he sees “everything that he had lost.”⁶² Through his loving encounter with her, which “left her flower-like,”⁶³ as he had found her—his “first good action” in years, “the first little bit of self-sacrifice”⁶⁴ he had ever known—Dorian experienced a “longing for the unstained purity of his boyhood.”⁶⁵ He is now, in a sense, in tune with the original seeds of truth and goodness within him, in tune with his real self; he has changed a little and does not want to have the same life.⁶⁶ But because the portrait which has been his conscience bears the effects of wrong-doing, he thinks he needs to destroy it in order to be “free” and “at peace.”⁶⁷ At the end of the novel, Dorian who had become his own artistic creation destroys not the portrait, a symbol of the inescapable conscience, but himself. He could no longer recognize the difference between reality and artistic creation. The moment of reversal and recognition which he had experienced in love could not withstand the destructive effects of art for art’s sake and of self-forgetfulness.

FALSE VERSUS TRUE BEAUTY

The desire for the beautiful which is presented in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* stands in stark contrast to the desire for union with the beautiful described by C. S. Lewis in the introduction of this essay. In the novel we are presented with a false and deceptive beauty which does not bring Dorian out of himself but rather locks him entirely within himself. Such beauty does not awaken the longing for a transfinite good but only stirs up the desire for possession and pleasure. There is no doubt that in our contemporary world there is a proliferation of images which attest to this false and deceptive beauty. Moreover, Dorian’s loves are just as false and deceptive as is the dazzling beauty

62. *Ibid.*, 167.

64. *Ibid.*, 161.

66. *Ibid.*, see 165–66.

63. *Ibid.*, 160.

65. *Ibid.*, 167.

67. *Ibid.*, 169.

that makes him turn in upon himself. It is interesting to note not only the moment of reversal and recognition which brings Dorian to his inner self, to that natural inclination to the true and the good present in all men, but also the need for correcting and purifying the desire or eros for the beautiful. This too is recognized by Dorian: he laments the lack of real friendship and noble love in his life which could have brought about his transformation or salvation.⁶⁸

The Picture of Dorian Gray attests to the fact that the arts are far from being morally neutral and indifferent to truth, despite the author's extravagant claims. As we see in the protagonist of the novel, delight in sensual pleasures which brings about self-forgetfulness or self-alienation is not the happiness we seek. The arts, on the contrary, which enable us to experience the joy of knowing of which Aristotle speaks give us, as it were, a foretaste of happiness. They enable us to come into contact with our true selves or our thoughtful selves, with our longing to be united with the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. This recognition may well require a remaking of the self, a redirecting of our lives to the true good and the ultimate telos. The arts and the beauty they convey, understood in the light of the Ancients, can indeed become a way to the true and the good.

68. *Ibid.*, 93.

CONCLUSION

Since the completion of the manuscript of this book, a number of books and essays have been published that deal with truth, goodness, and beauty in rich and thought-provoking ways, a testimony to the perennial interest of these aspects of being.¹ Given our age's quasi-obsession with physical beauty, it is no surprise that works on beauty seem to abound and that philosophers and theologians, among others, are reflecting on what has been called the forgotten transcendental.²

For those of us who have the good fortune to be able to dedicate time and thought to the study of the transcendentals and their connection to human knowledge and human action, the task seems particularly urgent now given the age in which we live. In a culture of cognitive and ethical relativism where the true and the good are put into question—if not altogether denied—the beautiful too has been relegated to the subjective realm. And yet, because of the interest which the beautiful evokes in all of us, it may well be through reflection on the beau-

1. I am thinking here, for example, of John Rist's *What Is Truth? From the Academy to the Vatican* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), in particular his chapter titled "Divine Beauty: Nature, Art, and Humanity," 143–200, and of Roger Scruton's brief but magnificent work *Beauty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

2. See the introduction of this book, note 1.

tiful and our experience of it that we are able to uncover important truths about the human person and his deepest longings.

In the third part of this book consideration was given to the relationship of aesthetics and ethics and more specifically to the beautiful as a true good and object of practical reason. The distinction between real goods and apparent goods correlates, as we have tried to show, to the distinction between what is really beautiful and what is only seemingly beautiful and thus a lesser sort of beauty. This distinction has been discussed in John Rist's *What Is Truth? From the Academy to the Vatican*. Since we all love the beautiful and the beautiful inspires us to act, there is a need to discern the truly beautiful from the apparently beautiful. While we are naturally inclined to the true good, we may experience the pull of our passions and evil habits that draw us away from what is truly good and beautiful. We can therefore find ourselves in a state of division and conflict; or, as Rist puts it, we may experience that we are divided selves, desiring and loving a variety of things that may well be only deceptively and seductively beautiful.³ We are in need therefore of correcting and purifying our desire or love for the beautiful; only such correction through virtue and ultimately through divine grace will enable us to perceive things in their true light and beauty. As we practice virtue and also beg for the supernatural help of grace to do what we cannot do through mere human effort, we will gain greater knowledge as to the nature of the true good, the truly beautiful, and heightened self-knowledge as well.⁴

In a secularized culture one might of course question the need for the supernatural power of grace, and yet, ultimately, moral beauty is impossible without it. In arguing for a Chris-

3. See John Rist, *Real Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and *What Is Truth? From the Academy to the Vatican*, 169–70.

4. Toward the end of the third essay in this book where I speak of “a spiritual renewal,” it is evident from what is said there that such renewal requires not only the practice of virtue but also docility to the workings of divine grace, for grace provides the strength that human effort alone cannot supply.

tian aesthetics and metaphysics, Rist shows how Augustine, indebted to Neoplatonism but drawing on the resources of Christianity, developed a personal account of true beauty: from the personal beauty of God in Christ, lesser beauties, in particular, the beauty of man made in God's image, can be explained.⁵ When man prefers beauties that are not true goods, beauties that are in no way proportionate to the supreme beauty and the true goodness that is God, then he turns himself away from the source of all beauty and of love, he loses his original beauty which can only be recovered through divine re-creative activity; only God can make him beautiful and lovable once again.⁶

The conception of man as *imago Dei* is of the utmost importance here, as we have mentioned elsewhere in these essays; it is this conception of man that attests to his greatness: a being whose intellect is the capacity to attain the highest truth, the highest good, and the highest beauty. Because man is more than a material or physical being, more than the *imago hominis* to which he has been reduced in our civilization of the image, he can act from a higher stance than that of instinct and immediate self-gratification. Reflection on the aesthetic experience itself can bring us to this conclusion. Our interest in the beautiful is not for any utilitarian reason; the beautiful interests us because of its real and intrinsic value. We take an interest in the beautiful for its own sake; therefore, our interest in the Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo, for example, is in the particular artwork itself and not in any purpose it may serve. When we want something for its beauty, what we actually want is to contemplate it, rather than to do anything with it. For this reason, true interest in the beauty of art is contemplative, not merely a sensuous or utilitarian interest.⁷ The form and the order of an artistic object appeal

5. Rist, *What Is Truth?* 179.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Our interest in the beauty of art may be called the Greek *theoria* which is contemplation. John Ruskin in his *Modern Painters* distinguishes between sensuous interest and true interest in art which he considered to be contemplation. See this distinction in Scruton, *Beauty*, 23.

not just to our sensibility but to the mind as well, and so the joy we experience in the beautiful is unlike the pleasures of food and drink. The truly beautiful is thus an appeal to the higher nature of the human person, engaging the life of the mind.

That the beautiful should engage the rationality of persons, as moral judgments and scientific beliefs also engage our reason, is of particular relevance where human beauty is concerned. While the sight of a beautiful individual inspires desire, Roger Scruton, in his book briefly titled *Beauty*, distinguishes between a base form of desire that targets the body and a higher form that targets rather the soul and the realm of eternal truths.⁸ This distinction leads Scruton to further distinguish between the interest in a person's body and the interest in a person as embodied, such that the beautiful human body does not refer simply to the body but rather to "the beautiful embodiment of a person."⁹ The desire that is aroused by the sight of human beauty is therefore a desire for the individual person rather than a desire for what is purely material or sensual. As Scruton, following Plato, sees it, eros is not the animal instinct to reproduce or to satisfy hunger and thirst, but rather "a *singling out*, a prolonged stare from I to I which surpasses the urges from which it grows, to take its place among our rational projects."¹⁰ The human person then need not act as an animal, for the higher powers of reason and free will make possible another type of comportment which sees in beauty "not just an invitation to desire, but also a call to renounce it,"¹¹ a call to respect the sacredness, as it were, of the human person, a being made in God's image, and not in the paltry image of man. Scruton points to a parallel between

8. Scruton, *Beauty*, 47. To distinguish these two sorts of desire, Scruton appeals to Plato and says, "No one was more aware than Plato of the temptation that lies coiled in the heart of desire—the temptation to detach one's interest from the person and attach it to the body, to give up on the morally demanding attempt to possess the other as a free individual and instead to treat him or her as a mere instrument for one's own localized pleasure."

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 46.

11. *Ibid.*, 54.

the desecration or the defilement of the beloved and the misuse of holy things. The experience of human beauty thus opens us to the realm of the divine and the sacred, where our attitude toward beautiful individuals—an attitude originating from free, rational choice—does not have to succumb to defilement and to the satisfaction of base desire.¹²

Scruton's important philosophical insights on human beauty are followed by equally valuable observations regarding natural, everyday, and artistic beauty. The beauty of nature enables us to experience, as Scruton interestingly puts it, "an enhanced sense of belonging,"¹³ whereby "the world *comes home* to us, and we to the world,"¹⁴ and where this world seems a fitting place for us to be, "a home in which our human powers and prospects find confirmation."¹⁵ That the world should be a fitting place for man, for the confirmation of his human powers, ultimately refers to the intelligibility and appetibility of things, to their truth and goodness, which can be grasped by man's proper powers. The "fit" between man's intellect and things has already been referred to in these essays.¹⁶ This natural fit, however, can be disrupted through the absence in us of the proper moral dispositions. For our interest in the beauty of nature is, according to Scruton, an interest in appearances, and things appear to us according to our gaze, according to the categories we bring to them; hence the importance of moral virtue so as to dispose us to the good of reason.¹⁷ The role of the spectator, his attitudes or dispositions, are therefore just as significant in his encounter with the beauty of nature as they are in his experience of

12. *Ibid.*, 54–57.

13. *Ibid.*, 66.

14. *Ibid.*, 67.

15. *Ibid.*, 65.

16. See in particular the first, second, and fourth essays: in these essays we referred to the fitting order of beings in the scale of beings, to man's fittingly disposing himself through virtue so that his actions be fitting to the order he has in nature, and we also referred to the fittingness of the existence of intellectual creatures for the perfection of the universe. Of importance here as well is the free activity of the person, right action, which has the potential to make the world a more fitting place for men, as we have seen in the essay titled "Human Life and the World Transfigured."

17. *Ibid.*, 70.

beautiful persons or works of art. The aesthetic judgment thus not only describes an object but also tells us something about the subject, for in the judgment of beauty Scruton tells us that “[w]e are giving voice to an *encounter*, a meeting of subject and object.”¹⁸

If in the beauty of nature we experience a world that seems right and fitting to us as its dwellers, this rightness and fittingness is also at work in practical reasoning, in “the aesthetics of everyday life.” We make choices as to how our homes should look, how our tables are set, how we dress ourselves; in these areas as in others there is a concern for appearances. The carpenter, for example, chooses among possible doorframes according to what “looks right,” what yields appropriate arrangement or coordination.¹⁹ There is, according to Scruton, a meaning that is contained in how things look; the right appearance of things bespeaks a subject who takes interest in what Scruton calls a “minimal beauty.”²⁰

Fittingness is a notion that is also present in art—the composer chooses notes that fit together, the poet puts words together rightly, the painter also looks to colors that fit one with the other, and this fittingness also reflects the personal life and the moral identity of the artist.²¹ Just as ordinary human beings are interested in achieving a certain order by choosing among alternatives according to what fits, the artist too is creating objects that are ordered and meaningful. True art is thus expressive of this deep-seated desire for harmony and order.

In recent times, however, the arts seem to be in “flight from beauty.”²² There are attempts to spoil beauty; Scruton gives as an example of the art of desecration, which is at the heart of the

18. *Ibid.*, 72.

19. *Ibid.*, 82–89.

20. *Ibid.*, 96.

21. In the eleventh essay in this book we saw how Aristotle emphasizes the artist’s concern for the fitting or proper arrangement of parts because according to Aristotle order and proper magnitude determine beauty. See note 28 in “Art, Truth, and Morality.”

22. Scruton, *Beauty*, 173.

postmodern experience, the 2004 production of Mozart's opera *Die Entführung* where the beauty of the music and the words which once spoke of universal love and virtue is now replaced by scenes of violence and egotistical sex. There seems to be a concerted effort in our culture to drown out, as it were, the voice of true beauty, because as Scruton so vividly says, "Beauty makes a claim on us: it is a call to renounce our narcissism and look with reverence on the world."²³ True art and beauty point us beyond the purely material and appeal to our higher nature, and so the desecration of works of art, along with the desecration of the human form through the pornography of sex and violence, is also a denial of true love and of the sacred. Perhaps it is the case, as Scruton sees it, that we live in "a loveless culture," which is afraid of true beauty because it is afraid of a love that involves sacrifice.²⁴

And yet, what a pity it would be for man, if it were precisely this sacrificial love that man needed to engage in so as to be fit or to become fit for the destiny that awaits him, a destiny of happiness which is somehow prefigured in the experience of the beautiful.²⁵ The concept of fittingness which is used by Scruton to describe the relationship between the beauty of nature and the powers of the human person and which is also at work in practical reasoning, in what is called an aesthetics of everyday life, can then ultimately be applied to the effort man makes in order to become fit for his ultimate goal of happiness which is contemplative activity. We should hope that rational beings can in effect live in a conscious pursuit of the beauty that fosters the recognition of the sacred and the value of sacrifice. Reflection on the beautiful, then, may indeed be a privileged route to both the true and the good, and education in the beautiful may well pave the way for a reshaping of our culture and world and for human happiness.

23. *Ibid.*, 174.

24. *Ibid.*, 178 and 194.

25. See, for example, the essays titled "Evil, Order, and Providence," "On the Good and Glory," and "The Experience of Vulnerability and Shame."

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