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WITTGENSTEIN  
AND THE METAPHYSICS  
OF GRACE

TERRANCE W. KLEIN

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*For my Father  
God's great grace*

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## Preface

The Cambridge philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein has twice made good for me on the soteriological promise that he offers in §309 of the *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘What is your aim in philosophy? To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle’ (1967: 103e). I still remember, with details of time and place, the personal entrapment and exasperation caused by two theological conundrums.

The first occurred on the grand stairs leading down to the atrium of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. I had just attended a lecture in fundamental theology, one explaining Karl Rahner’s theories on anonymous Christianity and universal, transcendent revelation. A classmate was expressing his delight with the open, optimistic understanding of salvation that had been laid before us, and he couldn’t understand my apparent lack of enthusiasm. ‘Don’t you see what this means for non-Christians?’ Standing on those august stairs, down which virtual legions of missionaries had walked from classroom to worldwide evangelization, I expressed my conundrum like this: ‘Yes, of course I do, and I’m delighted for them. My problem is figuring out what we’re about! Who needs the Church and its gospel if revelation, God’s offer of self, is transcendent and universal?’

I would carry that question through years of pastoral practice and study, and it wasn’t until I was introduced to the thought of Wittgenstein via George Linbeck’s now classic *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (1984) and Fergus Kerr’s *Theology after Wittgenstein* (1986) that an answer began to emerge. As Lindbeck read him, Rahner had erred in positing a mystery standing beyond language, something to which language imperfectly referred. Linbeck’s trenchant Wittgensteinian critique was that nothing stands beyond language. A mystery not woven of language can have no meaning for human beings. Hence the necessity of proclamation, of partial and admittedly incomplete expressions.



My doctoral studies, which culminated in the book *How Things Are in the World: Metaphysics and Theology in Wittgenstein and Rahner* (2003), led me to conclude that, while Lindbeck had astutely read Wittgenstein, he had failed to sound the deeply Thomistic depths of Rahner. The German Jesuit knew from his study of Pierre Rousselot that Aquinas understood human thought to be conceptual and sensory-based rather than intuitive. The Belgian Jesuit Joseph Maréchal had taught him that this made human cognition both forever partial and yet dynamically oriented toward completion. I was able to conclude that, although they presupposed and employed vastly different—and at times even opposed—philosophical traditions, both Wittgenstein and Rahner had rejected the Kantian notion of a passive intellect imprisoned within its own noetic constitution in favor of a dynamic, forever forging and foraging intellect. In short, looking for revelation beyond language is like looking for a tree without leaves. The goal is not to strip the arbor of its branches, but rather to follow the ceaseless striving of the foliage toward the sky.

The second bewitchment, to use a Wittgenstein metaphor, occurred in a classroom at the University of Notre Dame, while I was pursuing liturgical studies. In a course on ritual, a professor spoke of a Cincinnati priest, whom he had once observed, who had replaced the penitential rite with a cheer for the local football team, the Bengals. Clearly, he noted, the priest operated out of an understanding of grace that could only be called magical, because it was adrift from any ordering toward faith or comprehension. Remember, Aquinas insisted that sacraments are always oriented *ad fidem*. They are meant to address our faith.

What would lead a presider to believe that anything he did within liturgy would necessarily be holy, be graced, simply because it was performed by him? Wittgenstein would later phrase the question for me: what picture, in this case of grace, holds us captive? In this book, *Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Grace*, I suggest that the sorely bedeviled Cambridge don may yet save us from theological bewitchment about the meaning of the word ‘grace’.

It says something that the effort to explicate a word, one absolutely central to Christian discourse, and one which has become

commonplace in secular usage—‘what a grace this experience has been’; ‘she has graced our stage for so many years’—strikes so many people as a tilting at windmills. We certainly use the word ‘grace’ without constraint, but something in the idea of trying to define it provokes embarrassment. One almost has the impression that ordinary Christians are afraid that, if one were to look behind the curtain, a woefully mundane wizard would be revealed.

In an age where the cultural dominance of the empirical sciences still holds sway, a time when ordinary people believe that the words ‘true’ and ‘scientific’ are synonymous, the average Christian encounters a fundamental conflict between the heartfelt rapture of extolling ‘Amazing Grace’ and an unvoiced fear that grace can’t possibly be what Christianity claims it to be.

If an empirical mind-set, one focused upon entities, can’t locate grace within the world, we seem forced into one of two options. Either grace doesn’t exist, or grace is an occult object from another realm. A believer is ready to assess the first option as the mistake of the non-believer, but there is something unsettling about the second as well. Doesn’t picturing grace as an occult object, like a moonbeam of energy that comes to us from the realm of the divine, force us to profess belief in something that sounds thoroughly unscientific? ‘You can’t see grace, but it’s there.’

‘Why can’t you see it, or, for that matter, *experience* it in any other way?’

‘Because grace is heavenly. It’s beyond this world.’

‘But if heaven comes into this world when grace is present, how can it be in the world and yet be undetectable? Does that mean that heaven itself is ultimately something unreal?’

And that is exactly the place the Christian interlocutor doesn’t want to go. It seems terribly out of place in the twenty-first century to identify grace as some sort of undetectable moonbeam, though that option seems preferable to denying its existence altogether. But are those the only choices available?

Adapting a famous aphorism of Wittgenstein’s is helpful here. It’s easy to be held captive by the wrong picture. Christianity has never taught that grace is an object, not even an occult one. So why do we continue to think and, one should add, act in our sacramental praxis as though grace were a little bundle of the divine substance, one

dispensed through the agency of the Church, even if we admit that it sometimes grows wild in sunsets and in mountain views?

Some might think that the whole problem is solved simply by saying that grace is the divine life within us. Fine, but what does that *mean*? It seems no more capable of scrutiny than my saying that my deceased father lives on in me. Others will benignly grant the use of the expression, yet most would insist that my father isn't *substantially* present inside of me. I have memories of him, genetic dispositions inherited from him, behaviors modeled after his, but he's not in me. The *substance* that is one person can't possibly enter the *substance* of another.

'Substance' is another word that tends to conjure up misleading pictures, pictures that will need to be explored in this essay on the metaphysics of grace. Everyone uses the word, though few would find themselves in agreement with the definitions of 'substance' proposed by others, at least not if the history of Western philosophy is any guide.

To the minds of many, Wittgenstein is the great avatar of subjectivity, reducing everything to language. Yet the Lutheran theologian Otto Hermann Pesch, who has written extensively on grace, is surely correct when he reminds Christians that they can't preach around the *Zeitgeist*. Believers must ask themselves if they still speak the same language as their contemporaries. If words like sin, justification, and grace no longer have meaning to the person on the street or the one in the pew, is it any wonder that their proclamation falls upon ears that only hear a distant din? If Western thought has radically turned to the subject, then all theology must be theological anthropology, which is to say that it must make itself comprehensible and correspondent to contemporary human concerns, to our sense of alienation, of unfocused guilt, of dis-ease.

What does any talk of God have to do with men and women? How does it address their concerns about their own humanity? Pesch insists that 'When we determine that theological anthropology must deal with the existence of real (*faktischen*) humanity before God, the answer must run: the place and the theme of theological anthropology lies in the teaching about grace and justification' (1983: 36; my translation). Far from being an arcane area of expertise,

everything hangs upon what Christians think they offer in Jesus Christ to the very humanity of their contemporaries.

I begin this essay with the thought of Wittgenstein, examining the ‘language game’ that is grace. Simply put, how do we use the word? More than one scholar whose work was consulted in my research has lamented the fact that ‘grace’ is a very difficult word to define, because it immediately draws into its wake other words that are foundational to Christian discourse, words such as ‘nature’, ‘freedom’, ‘justification’, and ‘redemption’. My opening suspicion is that the sheer interconnectedness of grace, its seemingly intrinsic usage as a copula, should tell us something about its meaning.

Theologians looking for a complete treatment of what might be called the ‘subsets’ of grace will be disappointed with this essay, which scarcely uses the words ‘actual grace’, ‘prevenient grace’, ‘uncreated grace’, ‘habitual grace’, etc. It’s not that I haven’t been cognizant of those words while writing. It’s that my aim has been to offer a new ‘picture’ of grace, a conceptual, and therefore visual, image of what Christians mean when they use the word. If that image is sound, one can then make the required adjustments in the meaning of the various subsets of grace traditionally employed by Christians. I remain convinced, however, that if one starts with the wrong picture, subsequent terms only muddle the more an already cloudy conceit. For the same reason, when I refer to conciliar teachings on grace, I usually do so in the footnotes, not to marginalize those teachings, but rather to keep prominent this essay’s primary concern, which is the cognitive picture employed when referencing grace.

No one with my limits of time and ability could hope to present an exhaustive historical treatment of grace. I offer here only historical vignettes, none of which, even in itself, is exhaustive. They have been chosen because they represent pivotal moments in the history of discourse about grace. This is not a textbook on grace, and I have thus felt under no compulsion to discuss every conceivable aspect of the topic, nor every historical development and personage that might fall under it. For the most part, primary figures in the history of grace are presented chronologically, yet sometimes a thematic discussion will force me to move back and forth in history to illustrate and compare the consequences of employing different options in discourse about grace.

My thesis is simple enough. When Christians use the word 'grace', they reference within language the point of contact between humanity and the divine. I want to argue that on the human side of this valence lies an *act of perception*, one made possible because language itself is the 'place of contact' between God and humanity. Language, here meaning human thought and perception, exhausts itself unless it encounters something other than itself. It runs its limit, but not without effect if one trusts revelation itself, which I will want to argue is itself both a grace and the proclamation that grace is everything. That of course will require explanation.

I begin in Chapter 1 with a brief introduction to the thought of Wittgenstein, essentially arguing that Christians have nothing to fear by an acceptance of his now commonplace maxim that the meaning of any word is its usage, not some occult object lying beyond the word. Surely examining how Christians have used the word 'grace' should be salient in any attempt to revitalize our own comprehension of it. The chapter introduces the thought of this seminal thinker to those who might be unfamiliar with it, but it also takes discussion of Wittgenstein's writings to a deeper, theological level. What is the relationship between the divine and the human in the thought of Wittgenstein? Can the word 'grace' find a place within the world of his discourse?

In Chapter 2 I take up the biblical roots of the word, noting that grace begins its life as an act, specifically the human perception of being favored by God. All revealed religions view their adherents as graced, or favored, by God even if the purpose of this favoring is ultimately a more universal election for all peoples. Christianity understands itself as eliciting an all-encompassing response from a humanity summoned to recognize what God has done in Jesus Christ. In its encounter with non-biblical thought, specifically Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, the Galilean religion would be forced to defend what could be called 'the emergence of history from nature' and its proclamation of historical predilection on the part of God. St Augustine of Hippo will appear as grace's champion in this struggle, defending salvation history by recasting it as a great dialogical drama of love. I will argue that the passion driving Augustine was a personal, nuptial relationship, one inadequately expressed by the concept of nature, demanding instead that history be seen as the foundational

horizon for grace. In Augustine, grace is essentially an encounter with love, and love is both a relational and a noetic *event*.

Chapter 3 considers the contributions of Aquinas, arguing that his work remains trenchantly pertinent, though it stands in need of three retrievals to prevent contemporary distortions. The first considers the meaning of 'nature' in Thomas's thought, which is a way of asking about God's relationship to the world. I support the contention that, because of paradigm shifts, the dyad of nature and supernatural, which Thomas successfully employed to acknowledge the gratuity of grace, ironically now seems to suggest its superfluity. If nothing else, the historically recent debate within Roman Catholicism on the relationship between the natural and the supernatural reveals the role that shifting philosophical and cultural paradigms play in the life of theological assertions. I return to that debate from the vantage point of linguistic philosophy to suggest that designations of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the discussion are entirely dependent upon the language game in play. For example, in the sixteenth century, Michael Baius wrongly rejected the word 'supernatural' precisely because it was an innovation. He was wrong, because the new word was needed to maintain an ancient assertion in a changed paradigm. Yet in the twentieth century, Henri de Lubac could insist that he was a restorer, not an innovator, and that fidelity to tradition meant shifting assertions when their contexts of employment had altered. Perhaps it was time to jettison the word 'supernatural'.

The second retrieval concerns the ultimate meaning of 'form' in Thomistic thought. Aquinas spoke of grace as an accidental modification of form (*ST I-II* q. 110 a. 2). The fact that very few words in that phrase mean anything to the modern ear explains what I call the 'upward ontological drift' in popular recapitulations of the saint's work. We tend to speak as though grace were a substance, because we no longer understand what Thomas meant by substance. The very concept seems superfluous to modern empiricism, but Thomas was engaged in existential personalism, viewing all of reality as ordered toward communion. I will suggest that 'subject' is perhaps more faithful to his meaning than 'substance'.

A misleading picture of a form must also be jettisoned. A form is not something akin to a cookie cutter making its way through matter.

That's an untenable notion for science, and it's not faithful to Thomas, for whom form is that intelligibility which must be liberated from matter through human noesis. Understanding grace as a formal, noetic modification of the human person eliminates a mechanistic picture imposed by efficient causality, which cannot adequately account for human freedom vis-à-vis the divine.

Using Luther and Aquinas as test cases, I will argue that efficient and formal causality are radically different language games. The former is our way of explaining events within the world; it is also an assertion of a believer in regard to the very existence of the world. Yet even in the world of scientific discourse, efficient causality ultimately rests upon formal causality, because causal insight is not the discovery of a previously occult actor within the world but rather the appropriation of the world through the imposition of form. It is our way of bringing the myriad of the many into the intellectual grasp of the one.

The chapter concludes with a third retrieval, an examination of the neglected, noetic character of grace in the thought of Aquinas, or how it is that what Wittgenstein called 'the world' begins to speak. Unlike the Greeks, Thomas sees form as essentially unlimited. Its limiting principle is matter, and it is the task of human intelligence to liberate it from the same.

Chapter 4 shifts the search for the metaphysical foundations of grace into a linguistic key, asking if the experience that is grace would be more comprehensible to our contemporaries if one spoke of grace as *the apperception of being addressed by the world*. Here the assertion is that grace connotes the *experience* of the human person who *perceives* the *world* itself to be *speaking*, to be addressing the self through the perception of *signs* in the variegated elements that make up the world.

The twentieth century fundamentally reconfigured the relationship between the self and the world. Both Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, working in very different traditions of philosophy, rejected both the notion that knowing is simply an act of 'taking a look' and the Kantian presupposition that knowing is essentially a passive process rather than a dynamic engagement with reality. Today the concepts of self and world must be viewed as circumincessive. In large measure who we are determines what we perceive.

After discussing the heuristic nature of the world, the manner in which the word itself functions in language games, I discuss four fundamentally different worldviews: that of indigenous peoples, the Greeks, the Christians, and finally the modern world, noting that the place of encounter with the divine shifts in each.

What might Thomism still offer to our understanding of grace? I approach the question by asking about the silence of God. Is the positivist right in concluding that there is no God, because God does not speak? Or, following Wittgenstein, should one assert that even silence can be an element in a language game? Is the apparent silence of God due to non-existence, or is it the necessary 'space' within which all language occurs? One might want to ask: if God did speak in the way the positivist demands, would we be hearing God or an idol?

The entire discussion rests upon the shoulders of three Jesuit giants and an English cardinal. In taking up Karl Rahner's pivotal work on grace, I begin with his foundational, Thomistic retrieval of human knowledge, that it is neither inert reception nor noetic subjugation on the part of the knower vis-à-vis the known. It rather involves a certain communion with what lies outside the self, since the knower is ordered toward the world and, conversely, all that lies within the world is ordered toward knowing. Rahner links grace to our prethematic grasp of the *whither* of human knowledge, which never becomes a conceptual object and therefore is never directly experienced, though it makes all uniquely human experience possible. Just as human knowledge is not possible without this whither, what St Thomas called the *excessus*, so too human life cannot be understood apart from its orientation toward the life of God which is grace.

Rahner realigned two traditional tropes on grace. He argued that the best way to understand the causality of grace as we experience it in human life, *in via*, is by comparing it to our experience of God in the light of glory, *lumen gloriae*. He decidedly moved grace away from an inner-worldly, efficient causality, speaking instead of its quasi-formal causality, whereby God noetically transforms the human person because of our fundamental openness to relationship with the divine. When grace is 'pictured' as a noetic event, and after the linguistic turn a noetic event is rightly understood to be



ontologically transforming, one can return to Reformation era debates with fresh insight. I begin with the insistence of Ignatius of Loyola that grace is perceptible, at least that it is essentially ordered toward the act of perception.

The Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan brings clarity to the discussion with his lifelong insistence that the core of human knowledge is insight, not its conceptual detritus. A convinced and trenchant Aristotelian, he insisted that the perception of form is the result of our intelligence's *active* engagement with reality. 'Active engagement' will lead to the question of intentionality, which allows the entire question of grace to shift from the search for an occult object to the pursuit of insight, specifically the perception of that form which would validate the human search for meaning itself.

Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, takes up the specifically noetic character of grace, attempting to make grace comprehensible to those outside of Christian discourse, though clearly not outside of the event that is grace. I suggest that grace is the perception of a form, in this case, a form which is understood to be a sign, which is to say that the act of insight that produces the form is seen as the gracious gift of another, as a real apprehension of an Other.

Emphasizing the gratuity of grace and revelation, Christianity has always asserted both to be supernatural realities. Yet when one shifts the focus of the picture to the human agent, one may rightly ask how it is that grace or revelation is perceived to be supernatural, that is, something more than human. I suggest that grace is the apperception of a form that reveals itself to be the offer of a person. It is something akin to meeting a gaze. Hence it has a noetic, experiential element that represents real contact with God, without sacrificing divine transcendence vis-à-vis the world.

Grace is an incredibly balanced language game, though conceptual detritus sometimes muddles its playing field. Grace 'occurs' when the human being perceives God to be active. It is essentially ordered toward the act of perception. To speak of grace apart from perception is ultimately only to assert that God is pure activity, but the decisiveness of the gospel itself demands that we *perceive* God as active and awaiting our response in Christ.

The apperception of favor is a uniquely interpersonal *event*, that which occurs within history, not nature. To feel that the world

requires a response is only possible in a world of history, not a world of nature. We employ the word 'grace' when we perceive the world itself to be speaking, to be addressing us about its ultimate disposition.

John Henry Newman's illative sense will help to underscore the noetic and interpersonal character of grace. It will also help to free a metaphysics of grace from a narrow epistemology imposed upon it by the Enlightenment. A person who perceives the world to be speaking, and acts accordingly, has performed a noetic act that is not reducible to the canons of empiricism, but neither is it, strictly speaking, in contradiction to them. If forms are heuristic structures, which allow human beings to engage the world, then grace is the apperception of a form, which is both a personal act of perception and the apperception that one is being addressed. Augustine speaks of a light, which for him is not only a Platonic metaphor for the faculty of perception but also a personal address, one which reorders everything.

When meaning itself is understood as both a quest and a grace, as that which is sought and yet in the very act of seeking is given, the already-but-not-yet of the Kingdom, which Jesus preached, imposes itself upon Christian metaphysics, and then history reveals itself as something that happens not only *within* the world, but, more fundamentally, *toward* the world. In the thought of the later Wittgenstein, the world is language. It is composed of language, and therefore more essentially ordered toward *acts* rather than *entities*. After all, language is always an event. Wittgenstein came to give primacy to 'act' via an examination of language; Aquinas arrived at the same place through meditating upon creation, the world understood as coming forth from the word of God. In either case the world is an essentially historical reality because language is a web of mutually related elements.

The essay concludes with a consideration of the Trinitarian implications of grace, specifically why it is that the words 'Christic' and 'graced' should be viewed as essentially parallel in the world of Christian discourse. I will argue that language requires a hierarchical principle. We would know nothing if our knowledge were not directed toward engagement. Human knowledge is not a *tabula rasa*; such a putative faculty would only collect the dust of ephemera. Our

knowledge is always a grasping, a pursuit of a *perceived* importance which then leads *ad infinitum* to subsequent perceptions. This is the *Christic* antipode in the creation of the world, and it is the metaphysical meaning of the word 'grace'. If humanity loves, desires to complete the self in one other than the self, then it must name the Beloved in order to engage that love, because anything unnamed is not yet invited into the world. It simply is not.

When Christians assert that the world is created *ad imaginem Verbi* they further assert that the world possesses a teleology, but it is a teleology of the 'already' but 'not-yet' of the Kingdom of God. Something has been given, but only in kernel. In closing, I express my deep gratitude to David Burrell and Robert Masson, who have made possible both this book and my teaching career.

TWK

*Fordham University*

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## Abbreviations

### Plato's works

<i>Thea.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Tima.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>

### Aristotle's works

<i>Cate.</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>De gen. ani.</i>	<i>De generatione animalium</i>
<i>Meta.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>Nico. Eths.</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Physics</i>

### Augustine's works

<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>De bea.</i>	<i>De beata vita</i>
<i>De Gen. c. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi contra Manichaeos</i>
<i>De mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum</i>
<i>De mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i>
<i>De pecc. mer.</i>	<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum</i>
<i>De serm. Dom. in monte</i>	<i>De sermone Domini in monte</i>
<i>De spir. et litt.</i>	<i>De spiritu et littera</i>
<i>De Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>
<i>Epis. Ioan.</i>	<i>Tractatus in epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos</i>
<i>Exp. ep. ad Gal.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Galatas expositio</i>
<i>Gen. ad lit.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram, imperfectus liber</i>
<i>Serm.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>

**Aquinas's works**

<i>De pot.</i>	<i>De potentia</i>
<i>De ver.</i>	<i>De veritate</i>
<i>In phys.</i>	<i>In libros physicorum</i>
<i>Sent.</i>	<i>Scriptum super Sententiis</i>
<i>Sent. lib. meta.</i>	<i>Sententia libri metaphysicae</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa theologica</i>
<i>Sum. c. gen.</i>	<i>Summa contra gentes</i>
<i>Sup. de Trin.</i>	<i>Expositio super librum Boethii De Trinitate</i>

**Church documents**

DS	H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer (eds.), <i>Enchiridion symbolorum</i> (Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 1976)
ND	J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (eds.), <i>The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church</i> (New York: Alba House, 2001)

**Other**

<i>TI</i>	Karl Rahner, <i>Theological Investigations</i> , 23 vols. (London: Crossroads, 1961–92)
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# The World that is Mystical

## 1.1 THE GRACE OF A WORD

### 1.1.1 Referents in reality

What do we mean by the word ‘grace’? Such a question may seem an odd beginning for a theological work, but put the word into a search engine, see how many ways Christian and post-Christian speakers use it, and then insist that you remain a conceptualist, that is, one who believes that concepts deliver immutable essences. In this essay on grace, I apply a fundamental insight of Wittgenstein, that ‘*Essence is expressed by grammar*’ (1967: 116e; §371), or, put another way, that ‘Grammar tells what kind of object anything is’ (§373). So if the meaning of a word is its usage, what does grace mean?

Do we need the Father of Linguistic Philosophy to explain grace? Yes, we could use the help. Like the Patriarch Isaac, Wittgenstein enjoys the unusual status of having sired two potent philosophical movements, which already warred within the womb, and thus two attitudes toward discourse on the divine. Both positivism, which would allow no discourse on the divine, and linguistic relativism, which would reduce that discourse to the purely human, represent distortions of his thought that occur when one neglects either the early or the later Wittgenstein. Study both, and one can discern what I call Wittgenstein’s Thomistic trajectory, which will prove to be very helpful in relating the word ‘grace’ to perennial human concerns.

But doesn’t Wittgenstein’s most famous aphorism, which comes at the close of his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, place him firmly in the ranks of fideists, those who would assert a belief in God without the



support of reason? At the end of that very short, decisive, and decidedly influential tract, one directed toward exploration of the epistemological foundations of modern science, Wittgenstein takes up the question of the ‘mystical’, that which eludes science. He wrote, ‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’ (1961: 74; §7). That would seem to make him neither sympathetic, nor very useful, to the task of theology, which is always to understand faith, but to fully appreciate the mysticism of the *Tractatus*, one must first appreciate its governing *Geist*.

In the *Tractatus*, which Wittgenstein began before the First World War, the Cambridge-trained philosopher sought to establish firmly the relationship between three elements, each of which at the time was understood to be a distinct, though parallel, realm: thought, language, and reality. They still seem so in the minds of many. Reality seems to lie spread out before us, distinct from us: solid, objective—in short—‘real’. We form thoughts about reality that we subsequently express in language. All that’s left to do is to judge the accuracy, and adequacy, of our linguistic formulations. Is a given proposition, a statement about reality, true or false?

By the turn of the twentieth century, however, philosophers had plenty of reservations about these three parallel realms. Take Bertrand Russell’s famous query: What are we referring to in reality, in this republican age, when we say, ‘the present king of France is bald’ (1965: 21). Traditional philosophy would say that we have merely conjoined concepts, at least one of which lacks a referent in reality, to produce an assertion that is neither true nor false, because the assertion, taken as a whole, lacks a reference to reality.

But if we can deliberately use words without referents, words like ‘unicorn’, ‘mermaid’, or ‘Excalibur’, is it possible that we *unwittingly* use words that also lack referents in reality? Some would want to offer as examples: ‘God’, ‘angels’, and our word ‘grace’. Russell concurred with their view, but he was much more worried about the words that empirical science needed in order to operate, words such as ‘class’, ‘field’, or even an apparently innocuous word like ‘same’. His greatest labor was devoted to finding referents in reality for apparently simple words like ‘one’, ‘two’, or ‘three’. Russell and Alfred North Whitehead labored for years to find those referents, eventually producing the three-volume *Principia mathematica*. Forty-five hundred pages in

manuscript, it attempted to show that numbers are ultimately reducible to logic. Even Russell admitted that few people could claim to have read the entire, influential work (Monk 1990: 193).

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* occupies less than seventy-five printed pages, but no one can claim to appreciate twentieth-century thought without reading it. It inaugurated what has subsequently been called 'the Linguistic Turn' in modern philosophy. I want to insist that several lasting philosophical achievements of the *Tractatus* remain salient for Western thought, and they correspond to three perennial theological concerns: the world, the self, and God.

One could say that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein wanted to map the world. To use older language, he attempted to assign a name (*nomen*) to every conceivable object in the world (*nominationum*). Of course Wittgenstein didn't think that he could personally know of every object in the world. That would demand, perhaps endless, generations of empirical research, but the *Tractatus* did presume that the correspondence between reality and language wasn't yet being pursued at the correct level. Language was full of potentially misleading terms, ones which needed to be broken down into their 'atomic' elements through the development and use of symbolic logic. Atomic elements would be those that could be identified by ostensive definition, meaning that, for the sake of someone learning the language, one could point and say, 'Here is an X.' If a perspicuous language could be found, correspondence would be evident on three imbricating layers: thought, words, and the reality they both mirrored.

What came to be known as Wittgenstein's 'picturing theory of language' was viewed for a generation as the *sine qua non* of a still nascent philosophy of science. The theory asserts that a correct proposition is a 'picture' of reality. Each element in the proposition corresponds to an element in reality. Presuming upon it, twentieth-century science would know that the words it employed accurately corresponded to reality. 'The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (or the whole corpus of the natural sciences)' (1961: 25; §4.11).

If one is new to the discussion, Wittgenstein's solution might seem obvious. So why did it astound the philosophical world? Because it resolved a number of previously unsolved conundrums. One was the problem of classes, which was absolutely essential to the

development of a philosophy of mathematics. As his biographer Ray Monk explains, Russell first identified what has become known as ‘Russell’s paradox’ in the spring of 1901.

It arose from considering the class of all classes that are not members of themselves. Some classes *are* members of themselves: the class of all classes, for example. But most classes are not. We ought, then, to be able to form the class of all those classes that are not members of themselves. But now, if we ask of *this* class whether it *is* a member of itself or not, we seem to arrive at an unavoidable contradiction: if it *is* a member of itself, then it is not, and if it *is not*, then it is. It is rather like defining the village barber as ‘the man who shaves all those who do not shave themselves’ and then asking if *he* shaves himself or not. (1990: 143)

What may seem like a trivial word puzzle becomes irritatingly crucial when attempting philosophically to define something like the greatest cardinal number.

The other issue had to do with the use of logic in the formulation of a perspicuous, symbolic language. How does one denote logical operations (affirming, conjoining, negating) in this language, one determined to use only symbols that correspond to elements in reality? For example, how does one point, for the sake of someone learning the language, to a ‘not’?

In Wittgenstein’s Picturing Theory of Language, logic ‘drops out’. It isn’t denoted in the language, because it is not an element in the world. It’s our fundamental way of relating to the world. ‘Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental’ (1961: 65; §6.13). And a class, or any complex object, isn’t referred to, it is mirrored. ‘Indefinables are of two sorts: names, and forms. Propositions cannot consist of names alone; they cannot be classes of names . . . Propositions (which are symbols having reference to facts) are themselves facts: that this inkpot is on this table may express that I sit in this chair’ (1979: 96–7).

What’s that about an inkpot and sitting? The idea is that anything can be made a symbol in a language, even an inkpot on the table. It may be a sign to the housekeeper not to disturb the professor’s desk, but in another system it might mean, say, that the professor sits at this desk, not that one. Every element in a language stands for, or pictures, an element in reality. This assertion would lead to Wittgenstein’s distinction between saying and showing. What can be formulated into the

perfect language can be said. Some things, however, can only be shown, not said, like the correspondence between two pictures. To 'say' the correspondence between language and reality would require an intermediate language, but then that language would also require the same. One is left with an infinite regress.

### 1.1.2 Mapping the world

Having cleared the ground of obstacles, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* was then ready 'to map' the world. Take some time to appreciate the elegance of Wittgenstein's early modernist prose. It parallels the austere, oriented-toward-function work of the Viennese architect Adolf Loos, who believed that reason should determine the way in which we erect structures and employ furnishings. The *Tractatus* is modern architecture in prose (cf. Janik and Toulmin 1973).

The world is all that is the case (1961: 5; §1).

The world is the totality of facts, not of things (§1.1).

The world is determined by the facts, and by their being *all* the facts (§1.11).

For the totality of facts determines what is the case, and also whatever is not the case (§1.12).

The facts in logical space are the world (§1.13).

The world divides into facts (§1.2).

Each item can be the case or not the case while everything else remains the same (§1.21).

If Wittgenstein is understood correctly, one can't really say that he maps the world. Rather, the world itself is a map, a map of reality. It's our 'picture' of reality. Remember, the world is not defined as that which is. It's our *mental appropriation* of whatever there is. 'The world is the totality of facts, not of things.' What's the difference? I can assert that the cat is on the rug, but that is quite different than the cat being on the rug. The assertion is called a fact; an actual cat on an actual rug is the reality to which the fact, a mental act of appropriation, refers. Between the two lies the great gap of judgement, whether affirmation or negation. It may, or may not, be true that the cat is on the rug.

It's also important to note that Wittgenstein's master-map, or world-picture, is being pictured spatially. In the *Tractatus*, logical space is like a giant, coordinated grid, upon which every putative object in the world finds a spot. Logic 'marks out' the object's space.

What's not in the world? First, logic isn't. One can't point to a spot on the grid and say, 'This is logic.' Why not? Because logic creates the grid. Secondly, and most importantly, one can't point to a spot on the grid and say, 'Here I am!' Why not? Because the self cannot belong to (the set that is) the world. The self is needed to judge the world, to ascertain the adequacy or inadequacy of this world of facts. It helps to remember that the world is not what is 'out there'. It is a collated bundle of assertions about what is out there. We can speak of the self being in the world, give it a mental nexus within the skein, but any such speech is a form of assertion that still needs to be verified by the self who judges the world in the act of affirmation or negation. That self never enters the world!

Regarding the self who knows, Wittgenstein asserted that the solipsist is both right and wrong. The solipsist is correct in seeing the entire world as an extension of the self, around which it necessarily pivots ('I am my world'), and wrong to think that only the self exists (1961: 57; §5.63). The world does not collapse into the self, because then the self would become an object within the world, although, in this case, one coterminous with the world. But the self cannot become an object within the world for the simple reason that the self must ultimately act as that which judges, or validates, the world.

Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way.

What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that 'the world is my world'.

The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it. (1961: 58; §5.641)

The self that interests Wittgenstein is more than the psychological self of the solipsist, more than the cognitive faculty itself, which is capable of being enunciated within language and hence 'within the world'. That self would stand 'at the edge' of the visual field, but

Wittgenstein rejects that image as inadequate (§5.6331). Wittgenstein's 'self' is properly metaphysical. It cannot exist without the world, nor can the latter have any meaning apart from the self. Perhaps one can best explain the 'metaphysical self' by simply pointing out that the world must belong to somebody.

There's something else missing in Wittgenstein's world, the third member of the triad. Why isn't God in the world? Wittgenstein may have been a fideist, but his Tractarian approach to the question of God is entirely orthodox. What would it mean to make God one more object within the world? Wouldn't it mean picturing the world as a pyramid and placing God at the top? Unfortunately, this is exactly the picture most believers, and non-believers, carry about of God, but, even at the top of the pyramid, God would still be only one more object *within* the world. Even making such a God all-powerful still leaves that 'God' essentially within the same world or realm as ourselves. Remember that the world is not, strictly speaking, what *is*. It's what we can offer as an *expression* of what is.

This is why God cannot be *said* in the *Tractatus*, which brings us back to the aphorism we set out to explain. 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.' That's the negative side of Wittgenstein's 'world-as-map'. Yet the thought that God isn't 'in the picture' is entirely orthodox. St Thomas Aquinas said the same thing, and many times! For example: 'Since God infinitely exceeds the power of our intellect, any form we conceive cannot completely represent the divine essence, but merely has, in some small measure, an imitation of it' (*De ver.* q. 2 a. 1 co.).

The *Tractatus* was seen by the Vienna Circle, the early philosophers of logical positivism, as the constitutional document for the then-still-nascent philosophy of science. They saw Wittgenstein's work as finally repudiating the very possibility of metaphysics. Metaphysical discourse lacks empirically verified referents, and the litmus test of a valid proposition for logical positivism was empirical verification, or at least the promise of possible verification. And, at the close of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein did write:

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. Something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever

someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his proposition. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—*this* method would be the only strictly correct one. (1961: 73–4; §6.53)

The interpretation given the *Tractatus* by the Vienna Circle was dominant for years in Anglo-American philosophy, despite that fact that when Wittgenstein was invited to address the circle, he chose to read to them the poetry of the Indian mystic Rabindranath Tagore (Monk 1990: 243). That should have suggested a perhaps-too-hasty evaluation on the part of the Vienna Circle, but the other difficulty for positivist adherents of Wittgenstein is simply explaining the very subject of mysticism at the end of the *Tractatus*. What's *that* doing at the end of the foundational document in the philosophy of science? Is Wittgenstein's purpose only to tell us that metaphysics is a dead end? Or does the mysticism of the *Tractatus* represent a crucial first encounter with a post-Wittgenstein approach to grace?

### 1.1.3 A provisional definition: yearning

First, a provisional definition of grace. Surely it's possible to define grace? Doesn't the *Catechism* do that when it says that 'Grace is *favor*, the *free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life' (§1996)? This seems quite straightforward. Who could mistake the divine *acts* of favoring, or helping, for objects? So grace is an action. §1997 follows with, 'Grace is a participation in the life of God.' Again, participation is an act, not an object, but in §1999 the grace of Christ is called a gratuitous gift, which is infused by the Holy Spirit. So grace is an object? Or have we gotten no further than discovering the use of the *gerund*?

In his commentary on the *Summa theologiae* of St Thomas Aquinas, *Grace*, the great twentieth-century Thomist Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, paralleling Thomas (*ST* I–II q. 110 a. 1), distinguished three usages of the word 'grace' in ordinary discourse:

1. The love of benevolence conferring a gift which is not due; for example, we say: This soldier has the grace of the king. 2. The gift itself freely

bestowed; thus we say: I grant you this grace. 3. Gratitude for benefit received; thus: I render you thanks for your benefits. (1952: 3)<sup>1</sup>

Replace the word 'King' with 'God' and you essentially have what Garrigou-Lagrange considered the three supernatural meanings of the word.

Using the latter Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance, provisionally define grace as the 'point of contact' between God and humanity. How does the *Tractatus* bring grace under discussion, when God can't even enter the picture? In a closing aphorism of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein first rules out the concept of natural revelation, at least any revelation supported by reason. 'How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself *in* the world' (1961: 73; §6.432). Such a dictum would appear to make the world a quite *grace-less* place, since there can be no contact between God and the world, but Wittgenstein goes on to delineate what one might want to call a 'contact by inversion'.

He begins by suggesting that the world here mapped, which science will one day fill in with the use of a perspicuous language, will be incomplete, at least it will leave the human person with the *feeling* that it is incomplete. 'The facts all contribute only to setting the problem, not to its solution' (Wittgenstein 1961: 73; §6.4321). Of course the task of the empirical sciences is to deliver the facts. So why do they only set out the problem and not solve it? What is the problem?

In §6.4312, discussing eternal life, Wittgenstein asserted that 'the solution of the riddle of life in space in time lies *outside* space and time' (1961: 72). The riddle of life is the *meaning* of life. Wittgenstein identifies this meaning of life with God. One could even say he defines God as the meaning of life, but God cannot exist *in* the world. So how does God give meaning to life? What's the point of contact?

'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists' (1961: 73; §6.44). 'To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as

<sup>1</sup> The third usage does not exist in English, though it is common in Latin-derived tongues, since the Latin word for 'thanks' is *gratiae*. So in Latin one says, *Tibi gratia ago*. In Italian, *La ringrazio*.

Staying firmly rooted in his Latin, Augustine would rather blithely, but not ineffectually, explicate the theological meaning of grace from a consideration of its Latin root. 'What he means by voluntary rain is nothing other than grace, which is not paid out as earned but given gratis; that is why it is called grace' (*De Trin.* IV.1).



a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical' (§6.45). For Wittgenstein 'first contact' with God is not something to await, it's already been given in the *absence* of God. Of course this is an absence which makes itself *felt* as an absence. 'Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical.' The world that science will offer will be incomplete because the *yearning* will remain. At its center, this map has a finely delineated hole. One knows its presence only because of its converse. It is *known*, if you will, by inversion.

Of course this leaves the skeptic with a quick and, one must add, essentially correct retort. 'A' may very well *imply* '¬A' but it does not bestow existence upon '¬A'. It certainly doesn't. Wittgenstein isn't *proving* the existence of God; he's merely showing that his world-map has outlined God by inversion. The first contact, or grace, is nothing more than absence, but remember that absence is only possible within a field of expectation. No one says that a yellow parpergestack is absent from the world, because, until I made up the word, no linguistic nexus existed for a yellow parpergestack. If God is profoundly absent from the world, it can only be because the linguistic tissue that *forms* the world is profoundly *informed* by the concept of God.

Lest one think such a secular insight lacks profundity vis-à-vis the Christian doctrine of grace, allow some words of St Thomas Aquinas to represent the vast tradition of apophatic or negative theology. He insists that 'God as an unknown is said to be the terminus of our knowledge in the following respect: that the mind is found to be most perfectly in possession of knowledge of God when it is recognized that his essence is above everything that the mind is capable of apprehending in this life: and thus, although what he is remains unknown, yet is known that he is' (*Sup. de Trin.*). For Thomas the reasoning is clear and akin to that of Wittgenstein. God lies beyond that which the intellect can naturally perceive (*ST I-II q. 109 a. 5 and 6*). Only the divine initiative that we name 'grace' can provide any access.

#### 1.1.4 The grace element in Being

This discussion of grace isn't yet complete, because grace takes on another hue in the closing lines of the *Tractatus*. Grace is also *wonder*, what the great twentieth-century theologian Romano Guardini once

called ‘the grace element in being’ (1961: 101–18). For Wittgenstein, our second contact with God comes with the feeling, though perception may be the more apt word, that the very fact that *there* is something rather than nothing should give us pause, should inspire contemplation. It should lead to wonder. ‘It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists’ (1961: 73; §6.44).

It’s an age-old Western question: why is there something rather than nothing? But can wonder really be called a grace? St John of the Cross once suggested that the first sign of grace in a person is simply the feeling of gratitude. What is didn’t *need* to be. Of course wonder is only possible if one considers the reality that we experience, what scholastic thought called ‘proportionate being’, to be contingent, to be something less than ‘all there is’.

So the world of the *Tractatus* is a graced one. The divine and the human silently touch, necessarily silently, in our yearning and wonder. I do think it fair to say that, while Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is fundamentally open to God, Wittgenstein’s Tractarian view of theology, as speech about God, was essentially negative, although one might want to argue that Wittgenstein himself is practicing an apophatic, or negative, theology in the *Tractatus*. I suspect that he has something like theology in mind when he writes in §6.521: ‘The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. (Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)’ (1961: 73). Even in this most ‘scientific’ of texts, God’s absence makes God’s presence felt. That’s important to keep in mind, because within a very short space of time Wittgenstein was to dismantle the world of the *Tractatus*.

## 1.2 A SECOND TESTAMENT

### 1.2.1 Foundations lost and found

Wittgenstein published only two books in his lifetime. All other collections of his work are drawn from notes written by him or from the classroom notes of his students. As such, the latter are very

useful in understanding the philosopher's mature thought on language, but the fact that Wittgenstein did not choose to publish them requires that they be treated as ancillary and not primary guides to his thought. And theological readers unfamiliar with the two published works of Ludwig Wittgenstein need to know just how different the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* is from the *Philosophical Investigations*. Perhaps the best comparison would be to the Old and New Testaments of Christian revelation. The two milieux are quite distinctive. Some would insist that there is no unity between the two and that the latter repudiates the former. Others would insist that there is a profound unity, albeit one that only emerges with discernment.

Anglo-American philosophy of language divided between adherents of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the later Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*. Of course that division implies that either the earlier or the later Wittgenstein got it wrong. It's certainly true that foundational positions of the *Tractatus* are repudiated in the *Investigations*: most notably, the idea of the three imbricating realms of thought, language, and reality. In the *Investigations* thought and language are synonymous, and reality doesn't stand behind or parallel to either. The idea that logic transcends language is also abandoned in the *Investigations*; there logic becomes a function of language and therefore as variable as language itself.

It's easy to see why many Foundationalists, those who insist that human thought must correspond to something outside itself, find the *Investigations* a farrago of relativism, though many others, equally committed to repudiating philosophical idealism, think them wrong in that assessment. In either case, the acuity and brilliance of the *Investigations* are difficult to gainsay. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the work is the portal into the second half of twentieth-century philosophical thought.<sup>2</sup> The *Investigations* share a second

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein had wanted the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations* to be published someday in a single volume, with the epigraph 'It's generally the way with progress that it looks much greater than it really is' (Toynton 1997). I am not alone in emphasizing the continuity of the two works, although one has to delineate clearly where the continuity or discontinuity lies. G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker (1980: 457) argue that Wittgenstein's fundamental conception of the philosophical task remained largely unchanged throughout his career.

Kurt Wuchterl and Adolf Hübner in *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (1979: 82–3) make a pertinent observation here as to the amount of continuity or discontinuity various

similarity with scripture. They read easier with exegetical backdrop, which is necessary if their relevance to the question of grace is to stand forth.

With regard to the three focal issues of the self, the world, and God, Wittgenstein's thought is consistent in the two works, and the *Investigations* can't be understood on these three foci without a thorough knowledge of the *Tractatus*. Before considering a post-Wittgenstein metaphysics of grace, however, the profound implications that the *Investigations* hold for ontology itself need to be considered.

There's a well-known and useful anecdote from Wittgenstein's personal life that helps to bridge these two 'testaments'. Here is Ray Monk's version of Wittgenstein discussing his *Tractarian* work with Piero Sraffa, a brilliant Italian economist who became a close friend of his at Cambridge:

Wittgenstein insisted that a proposition and that which it describes must have the same 'logical form' (or 'grammar,' depending on the version of the story). To this idea Sraffa made a Neapolitan gesture of brushing his chin with his fingertips, asking: 'What is the logical form of *that?*' This, according to the story, broke the hold on Wittgenstein of the Tractarian idea that a proposition must be a 'picture' of the reality it describes. (1990: 260–1)

In the thought of the *Tractatus*, a hand gesture should be as qualified as an inkpot on a desk to serve as an atomic element in a language. That is to say that it should be capable, in one language or another, of being a *nomen*, a name, standing for a single, recognizable *nominatum*, something named. The problem comes in asking what its referent is in reality. Someone familiar with the gesture knows its meaning, but can it be said that the meaning is known because that person is familiar with a referent standing beyond language? The interpretation of the gesture seems to demand an assemblage of various elements, none of which can be known through ostensive definition. The *meaning* of the gesture doesn't seem to lie *beyond* language but *within* it. It seems to be a function of language itself, but

interpreters see in the two works. 'The judgement sharply depends upon the understanding of what Wittgenstein wanted. Whoever places logic and language philosophy in the foreground, will posit great differences; the person, on the contrary, who values the general philosophical insights more highly, sees a great deal of similarity.'

this calls into the question the entire paradigm of words taking their meaning from the reality to which they refer.

Wittgenstein offers another, easily understood, but troubling, example:

The word ‘Excalibur,’ say, is a proper name in the ordinary sense. The sword Excalibur consists of parts combined in a particular way. If they are combined differently Excalibur does not exist. But it is clear that the sentence ‘Excalibur has a sharp blade’ makes *sense* whether Excalibur is still whole or broken up. But if ‘Excalibur’ is the name of an object, this object no longer exists when Excalibur is broken in pieces; and as no object would then correspond to the name it would have no meaning. But then the sentence ‘Excalibur has a sharp blade’ would contain a word that had no meaning, and hence the sentence would be nonsense. But it does make sense. (1967: 19e; §39)

What the *Investigations* abandon is the notion that words stand proxy for objects in reality. Wittgenstein now insists that words take their meaning from their usage, that they come to us in functional congeries which he called *Sprachspiele*, language games. Each language game has its own grammar, or logic, which finds expression in the way that the game allows its users to formulate meaningful utterances.

But how many kinds of sentences are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols,’ ‘words,’ ‘sentences.’ And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics.)

Here the term ‘language-*game*’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (Wittgenstein 1967: 11e; §23)

### 1.2.2 The essence behind a chair?

Another way of experiencing the post-Wittgenstein world of ontology would be to ask: what is a chair? In traditional, Aristotelian ontology a chair is a thing, and it’s important to note that a chair is a *particular* thing. It *exists*, and that act of existence can be delineated

in human thought from every other act of existence. This is expressed in Aristotelian thought by saying that the chair is a *substance*. As such, thought distinguishes it from the myriad of ephemera that pass through our sensual perceptions. For Aristotle 'Every substance seems to signify a certain "this"' (*Cate.* 3b10). He continues, 'As regards the primary substances, it is indisputably true that each of them signifies a certain "this": for the thing revealed is individual and numerically one.'

Of course, a chair may undergo changes as it persists in space and time, all the while remaining a chair. A chipped chair is still a chair. Changing the color of a chair doesn't change its chair-ness. Aristotle called these the substance's *accidents*. Whatever its temporal permutations, as long as we would still call a given thing as a chair, its substance remains the same. Only its accidents have changed.

But why are a large, overstuffed recliner and a wooden kitchen seat both called chairs? They are two distinct substances, sharing almost no accidental characteristics. They do, however, share the *concept* of a chair. A concept recognizes a unity in two distinct substances. These are both chairs. Given the earlier *Tractarian* discussion one might say that they occupy the same spot in the logical space of our understanding, yet, if one is told to picture a recliner, a very different mental image emerges than that of a kitchen chair. Why do we designate these unique substances, with distinctive accidents, under the common concept of chair?

One of the ways in which Greek thought sought to reconcile the antinomy of the one and the many, the perceived unity in the pluralities that characterizes human life, was to suggest that concepts are ultimately 'guaranteed' by *essences*. It's the essence of a thing that defines it, delineates it absolutely in human thought, but this delineation must have a basis in reality since thought isn't arbitrary. Therefore the essence itself must exist apart from thought. It must be something human thought discovers, not invents. It must be something real, even though, as an essence, it is not any given thing, not a substance occupying any particular point in time and space. Essences are therefore *universals*; they transcend the particulars of space and time. Universals must therefore be real. If they don't exist in space and time, they must exist in the mind, or within the essence, of God.

And now, Wittgenstein's curve ball! His critique of 'family resemblance' would challenge the Aristotelian assertion that a thing *reveals* itself to be one amidst a plethora of appearances. He would ask if language doesn't simply allow us to collect under one heading an assortment of experiences bearing a 'family resemblance' which we designate as 'chair'. For example, suppose you visit a friend on the very day that your friend moves into a new home. No furniture is present. Nothing but shipping cartons. Your friend sits down upon one, and motions to another. 'Pull up a chair.' You know immediately what to do. Why? How did the shipping carton *become* a chair? The mind still retains the unique concepts of 'chair' and 'shipping carton', and it doesn't say to itself, 'I know that the object before me participates in the eternal essence of a shipping carton, but I will momentarily treat this object as though it were a chair.' In this context, it *is* a chair. You understood what response was expected. So would any small child who has mastered the language. Wittgenstein insists that '*Essence is expressed by grammar*' (1967: 116e; §371), or, put another way, that 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is' (§373). Grammar is the nexus of elements, the context in play during any language game, which is why mastery of the game and mastery of the grammar mean the same thing.

It should be noted that Wittgenstein's challenge to ontology is salient for far more than theology. What branch of human knowledge did not presume, before Wittgenstein, that names stood for things? 'When philosophers use a word—"knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "propositions", "name"—and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?—What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' (Wittgenstein 1967: 48e; §116).

### 1.2.3 Idealism and realism revisited

Is Wittgenstein a new idealist? If nothing stands beyond language, is he saying that there is no extra-mental reality? The only response to this question is to suggest, as Wittgenstein did, that the wrong picture is holding us captive. Wittgenstein is not an idealist. He is

not suggesting that reality doesn't exist outside the human mind. What may more aptly be said is that he reduces the human mind to language, to its ability to form the distinctions, converses, parallels, and patterns of meaning that *are* language. Wittgenstein rejects the idea of linguistically 'disembodied' thought, a thought that uses language to express itself as though some other medium might also be at hand. For Wittgenstein thought is language.

Certainly there are extra-mental realities. The chair upon which I sit is not in my mind. However, the physical object can only be grasped by my mind through the use of language. It becomes a chair through the use that my linguistic community has made of it. Imagine someone from a very foreign culture seeing it as nothing more than kindling. Are we prepared to insist that it is a chair, and not kindling, because the mind of God corresponds to our usage and not to the foreigner's?

Wittgenstein is ready for a potential interlocutor's objection: "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life' (1967: 88e; §241).

Wittgenstein is not an idealist, nor is he making language something akin to a Kantian mental a priori. Language is not a filter through which we engage the world. Language is, if you will, the very stuff of thought, the only 'form' that thought has in human cognition. For Wittgenstein, the question of the mind's contact with external reality is not at issue. The world around us is quite real. Its features and regularities give form to the patterns of life that engage us. The *Investigations* presume upon what might be called a realist position. Wittgenstein believes that we truly engage reality. How else could we so productively *interact* with it? For Wittgenstein, language is coterminous with efficacious engagement with reality.

So how does Wittgenstein differ from previous realists? Why is the 'linguistic turn' such an imperative shift? Because Wittgenstein reverses the noetic sequence. It is not: mind encounters reality and names that reality through the use of language. It is rather that usage and language are convolving; together they create what reality is for us.

They create what reality is for us? Isn't this a newly dressed form of idealism? Stanley Cavell, the eminent American interpreter of



Wittgenstein, is helpful here. Not everything that one might point to in reality, not every ‘this’ or ‘that’, necessarily bears a name, which is another way of saying that the Greek concept of essence doesn’t truly *correspond* to what’s *out there*. Essences aren’t out there waiting to be discovered; they’re attending the very act of linguistic creation. Why does language ignore so much of reality? Cavell writes:

How might you, and for what purpose, make a ‘that’, a bearer of a special name, out of the third cat you see during the day, or out of the part of the fingernail which is neither its moon nor its white tip, or out of the corner of cubical objects which is nearest the north pole, or out of a combination of any or all of these potential—or, for all I know, actual—name-bearers? That we do not normally *have* to *make* name-bearers into subjects (‘this’s’ and ‘that’s’) is true and important: language could not function as it does without a mutual and common agreement about *what* is being named or pointed to. And this depends on our sharing a sense of what is remarkable, or on our attention being drawn in similar directions by similar occurrences; depends upon these in as ultimate a way as it depends on our having similar capacities of sense and action. And it depends upon a sense of what claim will have point in certain contexts, and a knowledge of what the point is. (1979: 211) (Cf. Aristotle *Cate.* 7a6–21)

Reality ignores so much of what is *out there* because not everything *out there* has significance for human life. We think reality transparent to human perception, forgetting that human interests, and the language that allows those interests to coalesce, determine what reality is for us. One might say: language doesn’t determine the world *out there*, but it does determine the world in which we dwell.

A famous aphorism of Wittgenstein’s is also helpful here. ‘If a lion could talk, we could not understand him’ (1967: 223e). Is the question of how one should translate the words of the lion simply one of lining up, in parallel columns, the referents of his words with those of our own language? But wouldn’t the lion’s particular form of engagement with what’s *out there* create for the lion a fundamentally different set of elements in what the lion might call reality? Even human linguistic communities, which share basic human forms of life, do not share parallel languages. How many words does English have for snow? How many might it have if it were birthed in the Arctic?

Understanding the later Wittgenstein is a question of acquiring the right picture of language. Language includes, but is much more basic

than, a spoken tongue. In his earliest writings, Wittgenstein called language a calculus, but even this image he later rejected, because mathematical calculi evidence a regularity that ordinary language eschews. For Wittgenstein language exists when dichotomies exist. Language is literally the mind identifying one element of its world by contrasting it with another. Think up/down, fast/slow, soft/hard, present/absent, but then realize that every word draws its meaning from a skein of possibly related words. To move implies not standing still. Green implies blue and yellow, just as it implies blueish green and yellowish green, and it might even imply blueish, yellowy green if we had a reason, in the way we lived our lives, to draw that finer distinction.

#### 1.2.4 Living in a linguistic world

A fundamental insight of Wittgenstein is simply the recognition that human beings dwell in linguistic worlds. A world is all-inclusive, as worlds by definition must be. 'The world is all that is the case' (161: 5; §1). That's the opening proposition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, a work in which the whole numbered propositions bear the weight of what the author considered to be of greatest significance. A 'world' is always a heuristic totality. It's the horizon against which all other noetic acts are posited, even though it normally does not become an object of direct, conceptual consideration. Wittgenstein echoed Kant's assertion that human thought requires the creation of a world, a heuristic horizon.

A world must possess two characteristics. It must have a reference point around which it forms. Secondly, the elements that make up what we call a world must be interconnected, which is to say that they must stand in an internal relationship to each other and to the world's focus. A heuristic world is an interlocking web that revolves around a focal point, the knowing subject. It makes possible the acquisition of further knowledge. Visually, one can summon up the image of a circle. Every point lying within the radius of the circle stands in a determinate relationship to the center of the circle and is ultimately defined by this relationship. Through the center, it can be interrelated to every other point in the circle. As Wittgenstein

attempts to explicate the relationship of language to reality, he continually returns to both these characteristics of a world: an inter-connecting field that revolves around a common focus. The word 'world' functions in the thought of Wittgenstein as a symbol for a synthetic unity, one encountered in the reality that language births.

A world is also a necessary prerequisite of meaningful action. Ultimately the knowing self must decide how to dispose of itself *over and against* the world. In this case, even inactivity represents a response. Human life cannot choose not to exert itself. It is ordered toward engagement with the world. The self must go out of itself and engage the world in order to be itself.

The ultimate significance of the linguistic turn is that reality itself is not something guaranteed by something *out there*, beyond language. Reality is the essentially evolving world that language births. It is not established by correspondence with some extralinguistic, perhaps even supra-dimensional, realm. The stunning insight that Wittgenstein's *Investigations* offered the twentieth century was that reality itself is therefore historical. It changes: altering, developing, and transforming itself with the movement of human life.

So then, is reality capricious? No more so than human life itself. No individual, or movement within a linguistic community, can 'change' reality. Language alters with almost geological speed. It can change no faster, or slower, than human engagement with *what's there*.

If one understands metaphysics to be a search for the foundations or first principles of human thought, then metaphysics after Wittgenstein is essentially open-ended, though hardly capricious. The world in which the human person dwells is not guaranteed by something standing beyond the world. Significance is derived from the circumincessive life of the human person and the world in which he or she dwells. Wittgenstein removes the picture of an enclosed sphere, one whose contours are essentially determined by that which stands beyond the sphere.

'Reality as history' raises two salient questions: if language results in the creation of linguistic worlds, how does one world communicate with another, without relying upon something outside language as common ground, and how are the various elements within a world ordered?

The first question, regarding interlinguistic communion, Wittgenstein did examine. In discourse, we seem to move between disparate

linguistic worlds with some ease. We don't suddenly ask how electrons *feel* about their attraction to neutrons, nor do we typically speak of hormones to explain a downturn in the stock market, though given the right paradigm we might. This is why Wittgenstein suggested that language is all right as it stands. It normally doesn't require philosophical work, which for Wittgenstein meant gaining conceptual clarity.

Wittgenstein viewed the post-*Investigations* task of philosophy as a clearing away of the confusions that result when the rules of one language game are imported into another without acknowledgement. For example, in the collection of notes now called *On Certainty* (1969), he suggested that radical skepticism raises questions that are essentially inappropriate for the issue at hand. For example, should a person double-check that two times two equals four? But what would it mean to do so?

Perhaps I shall do a multiplication twice to make sure, or perhaps get someone else to work it over. But shall I work it over again twenty times, or get twenty people to go over it? And is that some sort of negligence? Would the certainty really be greater for being checked twenty times? (1969: 12e; §77)

What counts as an adequate test of a statement belongs to logic? It belongs to the description of the language-game. (§82)

The task of philosophy in the *Investigations* is essentially one of linguistic clarity, recognizing where one language game ends and another begins.

The second question, regarding the hierarchical ordering of languages, is not principally addressed by Wittgenstein, though it certainly has become a subsequent source of concern in linguistic philosophy. Within a language game, no element is superfluous, unless thought is muddled and language is idling. Language games possess their own unique grammars which essentially order and prioritize their individual elements. The question Wittgenstein didn't address, except in his reflections upon religion, was how the human person orders and prioritizes the disparate linguistic worlds that together form the world in which that person dwells. How does a human being relate meaningfully to the 'world' in which he or she dwells? Here the first properly, post-Wittgenstein metaphysical question has been posed; one which will return.

In the minds of many, the latter Wittgenstein represents the *Ursprung* of anti-foundationalism, but that's certainly not how he viewed the project of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In arguing that language is not based upon extralinguistic realities, Wittgenstein thought that he was simply freeing philosophy from a disastrous tendency to posit entities where none were required, and in many ways he lifted from theology an opprobrium at least as old as the Enlightenment, namely, that its words were meaningless because they did not stand for empirically verifiable referents. What Wittgenstein showed, to the theologian and to the scientist, is that words derive their meaning from their usage in a linguistic context. We don't possess occult objects, lying beyond language, which can act as referents for words by way of ostensive definition. The positivism that characterized the Vienna Circle has long passed in contemporary philosophies of science. Its ghost still haunts theology.

What then is the relationship between metaphysics and theology? Does theology demand a metaphysical substructure, and if so along what lines is this to be envisioned? Here the question that concerns us is: should we look beyond language, which after Wittgenstein is really to say, should we look beyond human experience for the meaning of grace? Even before Wittgenstein, that would seem an odd place to begin, given the fact that, whatever else one might say of grace, it always *refers to* the relationship of the divine to the human, to their point of intersection. Looking beyond the human would seem to obliterate one of the two relational elements, the human. We can't go *beyond ourselves*. So what is theological language trying to do here?

Perhaps the deeper question is why human beings continue to look beyond the human for the divine. Do we rightly fear collapsing the divine into the human, which would obliterate the real affirmation of what has been called 'the supernatural'? How could theology maintain grace as a point of intersection if one of the two distinct realities collapses into the other?

Yet if a two-tiered picture of reality is necessary, it seems ineluctably linked to a misleading picture of grace, as a supernatural object which is, so to speak, transferred from one realm to another, and, as an examination of the biblical data on grace will show, we certainly didn't begin with that picture.

## From Ethics to Epistemology

### 2.1 GRACE AS CONTRAST

#### 2.1.1 The favor of God

Neither the novelty of the Christian nor the integrity of the Hebrew experience is well served when one projects Christian concepts and perspectives back into Judaism, yet the fact that the first movement birthed the second requires some genealogical probing. Almost a century after the linguistic turn, if we do have a secure epistemological principle, it is that no element, even one that might appear unique to the point of being *sui generis*, can be an absolute *alienum*. In order to have significance for human thought, it must stand in some field of meaning and hence in relationship to other elements. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* insists, 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world' (1961: 56; §5.6). Something standing 'out of the world' can have no meaning 'for the world'. His *Investigations* maintain the interrelatedness of words and raise that interrelatedness to ontological status. Words do not take their meaning from extralinguistic elements; they always derive, create, and offer their meanings within language games.

Christianity cannot sever its relationship to Judaism for the simple reason that Judaism is an integral element in the language games that comprise Christianity. If one understands that essences don't stand beyond language, then to read Paul's assertion that 'Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1: 20–4) is to realize that he is doing more

than comparing and contrasting a distinct, monad-like essence with two others. On the contrary, through the use of contrast, he is literally creating the very essence of Christianity. As Jaroslav Pelikan put it, 'The very boldness of Paul in attacking the authority of the Old Testament law was predicated on a continuity with the Old Testament and on the identity between the God of the law and the God preached in Christ' (1971: 110).

Thus to examine the Hebrew roots of grace is not to ignore the novelty of the Christian concept or to denigrate its predecessor and companion in religion, but rather to give the Christian concept its full, which is to say its relational, significance. For as Otto Pesch notes, 'Even the New Testament, when it proclaims the grace of God in Jesus Christ, speaks of the grace of God to Israel' (1983: 77).

The Hebraic roots of grace seem both straightforwardly concrete and personalist, not surprising when one remembers that Judaism begins as an indigenous religion and as such first viewed the divine as that which bestows blessings in *this* life and not in some future, occult afterlife. In the earliest strata of the Hebrew scriptures, grace is primarily the Creator's bestowal of life itself. It includes 'length of days' (Pss. 21 and 119) and 'good days' (Ps. 34: 13). A graced life is bound up with peace and joy, good fortune, health, descendants, the fruitfulness of the land, and especially the gift of the promised land (Auer and Ratzinger 1970: 162).

'One Hebrew word which will clearly influence the Christian Scriptures is *hanan*. The (*hnn*) of *hanan* means to be gracious, to have mercy on someone. This good will is embodied in action. Grace (*hanan*) is a kindness expressed in a gift.' Of the sixty-eight times it is used in the Hebrew scriptures, it is combined forty-one times with the expression 'to find favor in the eyes of . . .' (Pesch 1983: 77). (Cf. Gen. 6: 8; Exod. 33: 12, 16.)

Cornelius Ernst suggests that this good will is embodied in a certain commonality of feeling between God and the human person. 'We may take as an example here the wonderful passage, Ex. 33: 12–23, with its association of the themes of favor and mercy, God's sovereign elective purpose, the mutual knowledge by personal name of God and his people, God's face and presence and the hidden transcendence of his glory' (1974: 16). The pericope so vivifies the Hebrew conception of grace that it bears quoting in its entirety;

Moses said to the Lord, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people;" but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight." Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.' The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'

Note the lack of divine antinomy. 'There is for the Hebrew no dualism between an interior disposition of benevolence and the outward gifts of grace' (Duffy 1993: 18). We know who God is by what God does in history, within our world, which is why the evidence from the most primitive strata of Israel's faith shows attention concentrated upon the blessings that Israel's God offered a nomadic people. Only much later, after sustained contact with other peoples, does Israel develop a proper theology of creation (Flick and Alszeghy 1982: 23) 'Moreover, it is clear that creation is not the theme the Bible most frequently addresses. In the Old Testament the determinative religious experience is the covenant of God with his people, his special relationship with Israel' (Ladaria 1983: 1).

Note also that grace, seen from the viewpoint of the person bestowing, is not so much an *object* as an *act*. What God gives is more than any singular object; God gives the self in the form of personal benevolence, which is itself revealed in the giving. The same is conversely true for the receiver: grace is not an *entity* received but rather *an act of perception*, the comprehension that God is present and acting benevolently.



The second Hebrew word closely associated with *hanan* is *hesed*, which the Septuagint will translate as *eleos*, mercy. It occurs some 250 times. ‘The experts differ about the origin of the root, some referring it to the “kindly” temper of those of the same kin, and some to the Semitic root meaning “desire”’ (Smith 1956: 10). Its Hebrew origins suggest ‘a love transcending duty, a love unmerited and overflowing in abundance’ (Duffy 1993: 23). When used of God, *hesed* typically, though not exclusively, is linked to the concept of covenant.

In his treatment of the Hebraic roots of grace, Johann Auer situates both *hanan* and *hesed* in the broader constellation of election. The Hebrew perceived God to be gracious, because God had manifested a predilection, first in the call of Abraham and subsequently in the Mosaic Covenant (1970: 162). *Hanan* and *hesed* are thus intrinsically relational concepts. One only knows the self or, in this case, the people to be chosen for the graciousness and mercy of God when one juxtaposes this favor to what has *not* been extended beyond the object of election. Likewise, God also appears gracious when his fidelity is juxtaposed to the sinfulness of his people (Pss. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

Religions of revelation—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—view themselves as the *result* of a divine intrusion into human history. This means that the very concept of revelation is fundamentally linked to that of grace, of elective favor. It is a predilection or favoring on the part of God that distinguishes the recipients of revelation from those who have not received it. Granted that religions of revelation view themselves as vehicles that ultimately serve the universal benevolence of God (and this is what gives impetus to the spread of the religions), they nonetheless begin with the claim, or the recognition, that God has acted preferentially in one place, and at one time, for a single, recipient group. ‘Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.” For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good’ (Ps. 122: 8–9). All revealed religions view their adherents as graced, or favored by God, even if the purpose of this favoring ultimately is a more universal election of humanity at large. ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’ (Isa. 56: 7). (Cf. Gen. 12: 3; Isa. 42: 4, 43: 9–12, 45: 14 ff., 51: 4 ff., 55: 5, and 66: 18 ff.)

For Judaism, the Exodus event manifests the concept of election and stands as its ultimate foundation: God has acted on behalf of the people. Indeed God's gratuitous action literally forms them as a people. Within the Hebrew scriptures, predilection remains constitutive of its worldview. Moses, not Aaron, is chosen to lead his people from slavery; David, not his brothers and not Saul, is God's choice for king. Esther alone can save her people.

In like manner, prophecy in ancient Israel finds its origins in an existentially experienced call, a manifestation of predilection. The election is a unique and unrepeatable experience for the individual prophet. Sometimes this is explicit in the message, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations' (Jer. 1: 5). At all times, the prophet must acknowledge that he has been the recipient of a revelatory word, and hence a favoring, from God (Ezek. 1: 1; Isa. 1: 1).

Remember that in the Hebrew scriptures, as Gerhard von Rad insisted, the word of God, *dabar*, is never representational. 'This noetic function of the word, the conception of it as bearing and conveying an intellectual idea, is... far from covering the meaning which language had for ancient peoples' (1965: 80). It stands for nothing beyond itself, because it is always active, accomplishing whatever it expresses (1965: 80–98). 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm' (Ps. 33: 6–9). Thus simply to have received the word of God is to be recipient of God's active favoring. The indigenous person 'makes no distinction between spiritual and material—the two are intertwined in the closest possible way; and in consequence he is also unable properly to differentiate between the word and object, idea and actuality. Such thought is thus characterized by an inherent absence of differentiation between the ideal and the real, or between word and object; these coalesce as if both stood on one plane of being' (von Rad 1965: 80–1). To have received God's word is not simply to be the bearer of a message. Far from it! Rather, one becomes a recipient of the very life and favor of God. 'So shall my

word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it' (Isa. 55: 11).

Islam likewise understands itself as the recipient of Allah's final, and finally direct, revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. Granted that this revelation comes, because of the transcendence of God, through the mediation of the Angel Gabriel, by 'direct' I mean that, for the believer, the revelation that is the Qur'ān is the immediate word of God and not a message that must be discerned through contemplation upon the events that produced the revelation, nor is it one that must be distilled from its human elements. 'They say: Accept the Jewish or Christian faith and you shall be rightly guided . . . Reply: We believe in God and that which was revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them and to God we have surrendered ourselves' (Qur'ān 2: 135). A Muslim is one who submits to God, whose will has been made manifest in the Qur'ān.

The Western religions of revelation share another foundational concept that must not be overlooked in any consideration of grace: creation. In these religions, the world is not co-eternal with God. It is not a primeval chaos out of which God fashions a cosmos. On the contrary, the doctrine of the creation alters the prerevelatory understanding of the world's relationship to God. The world of the revealed religions is a free act on the part of a gracious God.<sup>1</sup> It cannot properly be called nature, which suggests an essentially static and ordered skein that requires no explanation beyond itself.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The earliest strata of Israel's faith do not speak of a creation *ex nihilo*, though the doctrine is essentially affirmed by Genesis's rejection of those mythic elements among her neighbors that would suggest any type of emanation. God creates not through struggle with cosmic forces but by a sovereign word, and the latter suggests that God remains distinct from creation. Furthermore, 'the symmetrical description of the six days of labor suggests that God not only fills but establishes the three primordial spaces of the Semitic conception of the world (abyss, earth, and firmament)'. And finally, the human person does not find the self thrown into the world; it is essentially ordered toward humanity. When Israel encounters the Hellenic idea of being, she will explicitly assert that God creates from nothing (Flick and Alszeghy 1982: 24–5). Cf. 2 Macc. 7: 23–9.

<sup>2</sup> Likewise the insistence that the world, once created, cannot stand apart from ongoing activity of the creator. Cf. Augustine, *Gen. ad lit.* IV. 12 and Aquinas, *ST I*

The created world of the revealed religions reveals itself as the field and foundation of what would come to be known as history, the place where the divine and the human would engage in the dramas of election, call, and response. David Burrell is helpful here in contrasting the revealed revelations' desire to question the meaning of existence with worldviews that simply presume upon it: 'To refer to existence as an act bespeaks its intelligibility. And only a Creator can assure that what presents itself to us as mere fact enjoys a meaning, an intelligible structure' (1973: 201). Genesis thus acts as a heuristic agent in the question for existential intelligibility.

The drama of history reveals yet another foundational feature of Western, revelatory thought. At the very least, God and humanity share fellowship, one which will play out in the course of history, because, however differently and distinctly, both God and the human being are persons, and to be a person is to be fundamentally ordered toward fellowship (Smith 1956: 189). We employ the very word 'person' to indicate those elements within the world that can dialogue with each other, can enter into fellowship.

In his classic *Freedom, Grace, and Destiny* Romano Guardini identified the fulcrum upon which the religions of revelation move the world itself from the realm of nature, an eternal, timeless, and static cosmos, to a field of historical decision, the theater of truly cosmic drama.

Revelation teaches that God created the world out of nothing by His sovereign will. This implies that the world did not have to exist. That is confirmed by the sense of obligation which a man has—as one of his basic, existential experiences—of giving thanks for what he has and what happens to him, even for his existence and life or of protesting against what man is and even against his very existence. This gratitude and protest are not directed against this or the other happy or unhappy detail but against existence in itself. Such reactions could not arise if the world were necessary. No amount of lyrical or pseudo-religious talk can obscure this. We can never give thanks for what has to happen and we can just as little protest against it,

q. 104 a. This leaves open the question, as even Aquinas did, of whether or not the world might be eternal, meaning without a beginning in time. After Genesis the world is viewed as intrinsically related to something other than itself, namely God, and is thus contingent. As such the world of the believer is constituted by history rather than nature.

quite apart from the fact that we would be equally bound by the necessity. The whole of a man's perception and reaction would be part of the universal necessity: an attitude of gratitude or protest would be as unthinkable on his part as on that of an animal. (1961: 119)

The world itself as grace, as an act of grace and as a place of encounter with grace, remains a crucial consideration later in this essay, when the metaphysical implications of grace are considered. For now, allow it to stand as a foundational perspective of the revealed religions. The world for these religions need not exist. That it does, reveals a fundamental attitude toward us, namely the benevolence of a creator. As we saw in Wittgenstein's *Tractarian* work, contingency itself is revelatory.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1.2 Tightening the torque

Grace as a relational concept is both the point of entry into the New Testament and its fundamental assertion of distinctiveness. '[T]he Church as a whole gradually found that this word, like *agape*, was one of those that, being stamped with the image of Christ, best expressed its gospel, and that therefore its use, in a distinctive Christian sense, spread with Christianity' (Smith 1956: 58).

Christianity understands itself as both the proclamation and the prolongation of God's radical entrance into history in the Incarnation of the Son of God. 'With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph. 1: 8–10). The Christian proclamation of the Kingdom of God's outbreak begins in the consciousness of the historical Jesus himself, who viewed his own person and activity as God's uniquely unrepeatable offer of self.

<sup>3</sup> 'Stories of Being' in Kerr 2002: 73–96 offers a perceptive overview of the concept of creation in Thomistic philosophy, particularly when Kerr contrasts two views: Heidegger's contemporary rejection of the doctrine of creation, as hegemonic, in favor of a worldview in which what is—simply is; and Hans Urs von Balthasar's insistence that the teaching of creation establishes the deeply religious attitude of creature before a creator, which alone reveals the existence of love.

Cornelius Ernst is surely correct in arguing that other New Testament notions are integrally aligned with that of grace. ‘One very obvious candidate, it seems to me, is the notion of the “kingdom of God”. Apart from a few not very significant uses in Luke, the word *charis* does not occur in the Synoptic gospels; on the other hand, the “kingdom” or, better, “reign” (*basileia*) of God is central to the preaching of Jesus’ (1974: 27). Here the oft noted paradoxical character of the kingdom in the preaching of the historical Jesus is surely significant. The earliest strata of preaching the kingdom speak of it as already accomplished, but not yet realized. Why is it that Jesus himself seems to have defied the first law of logic, that of non-contradiction, in preaching a kingdom that is already/but-not-yet? Here let us simply raise a question that is of foundational importance for this essay: is it possible that insight changes the world itself? As Ernst trenchantly noted,

For our purposes here it will be sufficient to try to show that our experience of ourselves and the world is not in fact adequately analyzed in terms of a distinction between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ understanding; and consequently that our experience and understanding of Jesus Christ in faith is still less adequately analyzed in such terms. And if this is accepted, then grace too is not *either* ‘subjective’ or ‘objective’: grace is not *either* ‘subjective experience’ or ‘objective fact’. (1950: 66–7)

On one point, however, the New Testament is unambiguous. Grace unperceived is not yet grace effective (Smith 1956: 56; see also 157–86). Suggesting otherwise renders the very proclamation of the gospel superfluous.<sup>4</sup> This simple datum of New Testament evidence will be

<sup>4</sup> It is not my intention here to enter the lively debate concerning interreligious dialogue, especially the role of Christ in universal human history. Here it suffices to say that a Christianity shorn from its roots as a unique revelation of God could no longer enter the discussion as uniquely Christian. There is simply no way of exiting the language game that is revelation, one demanding that any conceivable revelation represents a favoring. Yet that which is unique can still be ordered toward completion in the other. Indeed if one sees completion in the other as distinctively nuptial, something I view as standing at the very core of Christianity, the very presupposition of such dialogue demands that each partner be uniquely its own self.

It would seem that chapter III of Trent’s *Decree on Justification* (1547) demands that Christians view all humanity as ordered toward Christ (‘likewise they would never be justified if they were not reborn in Christ’) even if one would want to qualify immediately in just what such an ordering consists (DS 1523; ND 1927); Cf. DS 1530; ND 1933.

crucial in the construction of a contemporary metaphysics of grace, one which recognizes the world to be more than the sum total of objects within it.

Note that the Kingdom of God derives its meaning only *in contrast* to that which is not of God. Like other religions of revelation, Christianity cannot coherently surrender its claim to be a unique recipient of God's favor, and this means that the existential situation of those whom God has favored must be radically distinctive from those who have *not* received the same. This is why Christianity presents itself as a tightening of the torque between God's action and that which stands outside of that action.

‘[W]hile the Old Testament simply divides men into good and bad, the New Testament makes a crucial change. Normally it speaks, not of good men, but of believers in Christ’ (Smith 1956: 56). One could say that the salient factor in the relationship of God and humans shifts from ethics to epistemology.<sup>5</sup> The question is not primarily the human person's ability to do the good so much as the human ability to recognize the good that God has done. Christ is the great event of grace, of God's favor, and everything turns upon the ability to recognize this manifestation. Indeed, Christianity's foundational apperception is that humans are called to election by God precisely because of their ability to perceive that Christ is himself the *elect* one of God. ‘Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight’ (Matt. 12: 18).

Consider the use of the concept ‘world’ in the Johannine writings. In the pre-Christian worldview, because the graciousness of the divine is expected to manifest itself within the world, no Jew, or any member of an indigenous religion, would ever have set up the

<sup>5</sup> No one underscores this point more strongly than Martin Luther. Commenting on Rom. 1: 16, ‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,’ he wrote, ‘This passage of Paul's, therefore, stands unyieldingly in its insistence that free choice, or the most excellent thing in men—even the most excellent men, who were possessed of the law, righteousness, wisdom, and all the virtues—is ungodly, wicked, and deserving of the wrath of God. Otherwise, Paul's whole argument is valueless; but if it is not, then the division he makes leaves no one on neutral ground, when he assigns salvation to those who believe in the gospel, and wrath to all the rest, or takes believers as righteous and unbelievers as ungodly, wicked, and subject to wrath’ (1972: 249).

Johannine polarity between Jesus and the world. The world is supposed to be good. In Judaism, it comes forth from a benign creator. So why does John, who wants to proclaim the incarnation of God into the world, employ a negative concept of the word? The concept of the 'world' in John can only be understood when one reads the word as the converse of Jesus and his activity. It is that which resists the new initiative of God. With his *pneuma/sarx* (spirit/flesh) dichotomy, Paul fashions a similar duality between that which acts under the impetus of the Christ event and that which offers resistance. '[T]he resurrection has a cosmic, universal significance. It is not simply one more event to be viewed in the march of history; on the contrary, it reveals the very meaning of it' (Ladaria 1983: 25). (See Rom. 8: 29 and 1 Cor. 15: 20, 49.)

What would have once been a foundational blessing is now cursed because of its relationship to, here its failure to acknowledge and accept, the second great initiative of God. (Cf. John 1: 10, 12: 31, 14: 19, 14: 22, 16: 18 ff., 17: 9; 1 John 2: 16, 5: 16, 19.) Indeed, as Luis Ladaria notes, sin for the Christian can henceforth never be reckoned merely as moral failure, as a potency in nature culpably negated. It is always a rejection of God's initiative in Christ and is therefore intrinsically Christological. 'One cannot speak...of sin as though the redemption of Christ did not exist, since this is determinative of the human person in all aspects of life' (1983: 217). Thus to sin is to do more than negate nature; it is also to shut the ear to the summons of history that is the Christ.

Likewise, the devil, who in the Hebrew and Islamic scriptures acts as a subservient and somewhat impish functionary of God, takes on the character of the Satanic adversary in Christianity. The New Testament calls Jesus the way, the truth, and the life (John 14: 6); Satan *in contrast* becomes 'the Father of lies' (John 8: 44). Goethe perfectly captured the Christian understanding of Satan when his Mephistopheles is asked his identity and answers, 'I am the spirit that always negates.' He continues, 'and rightly so, since everything that comes into existence is only fit to go out of existence and it would be better if nothing ever got started. Accordingly, what you call sin, destruction, evil in short, is my proper element' (1971: 780). Goethe's Satan is the implacable denial of the grace that *is* creation. To understand the depth of Goethe's deeply Christian insight into evil,



one need only compare the evil one's identity, 'the one who says no', to the last verse of the first chapter of Genesis in which God evaluates this world. 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.' Satan becomes the necessary shadow surrounding the light, which is Jesus Christ within the world. In Christ, God affirms the goodness of creation and his acceptance of it (cf. Mark 13: 19; Matt. 11: 25, 19: 4; Acts 4: 24, 7: 49 ff., 17: 24–8; Rom. 4: 17; Eph. 1: 4, 3: 9; 1 Tim. 4: 4, 6: 13; Heb. 11: 3; 1 Pet. 3: 5; Rev. 4: 11). Whatever else Satan represents to Christianity, he embodies the existential denial of that singular divine affirmation.

Christianity understands itself as eliciting an all-encompassing response from a humanity summoned to recognize what God has done in Jesus Christ. Freedom, around which grace pivots in the constellation of Christian anthropology, requires the possibility of the human rejection of God's offer of self. Hence the darkening of the shadows at the penumbra of the gospel. As Thomas J. J. Altizer insists,

nothing is more historically distinctive of the New Testament than its continual naming of demonic power, a power that is manifest and real only in the context of an apocalyptic ending and therefore only in the context of the actual advent of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was the first prophet who is recorded as having seen the fall of Satan (cf. Luke 10: 18), a final fall of Satan that is an apocalyptic epiphany—an apocalyptic epiphany that is a decisive sign of the final advent of the Kingdom of God. (1998: 207)

After Wittgenstein, it is hardly denigrative to view Christianity as a matrix of language games, which are always built upon dichotomies that become fecund through juxtaposition. So, for example, 'Christianity maintains two pretensions, which are not always easily reconciled at first glance: its universality and its exclusiveness' (Ladaria 1983: 31). The Church sees herself as constituted by election. She is favored, and therefore is herself an *act* of grace. Members of the *ekklesia* of God are those who have been 'called out'. Note the obvious: a call, to be effective, which is to say, to be a call, must be heard.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> An essentialist, rejecting the notion that all meaning is linguistic, which is to say relational, might find herself insisting that a call can be a call without being heard. One can certainly call out, perhaps in distress, without a response. But there is a difference between calling out and shouting in glee. While they may sound exactly the same, the former is ordered toward a response; the latter isn't.

This community is, in the most radical sense, a community of believers. '[T]he Gospel is an *offer*—and an offer that is urgent indeed. Otherwise there would be no “gospel”. But it is also true that God’s active love or grace or mercy is only complete when it is accepted. It is consummated in fellowship. Consequently, when these terms are studied in the New Testament, the stress is upon qualities that are active in *those who accept them through Christ*' (Smith 1956: 56).

The 'New' Testament presents itself as an axial delineation, which to ignore would be to eviscerate. 'To quote one text among many, the perspective of the New Testament appears in the great summary, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16)' (Smith 1956: 56). Indeed the New Testament 'uses the same expressions to designate the call of the elect to salvation (Rom. 8: 30) and the call of the world into existence. The identity of terms demonstrates that St Paul doesn't see a structural difference between the divine creative will and that which confers free gifts' (Flick and Alszeghy 1982: 44–5). Creation itself is being reread in the light of the Christ event.

### 2.1.3 More metaphor than metaphysics

In the Septuagint, the Hebrew *hen* is translated as *charis*, a Greek word meaning favor. *Charis* is a derivative of *chairein*, 'to rejoice', and 'it always expresses delight, whether in secular, Septuagintal, or Christian literature' (Ernst 1974: 13; Smith: 1956: 57). Paul finds it an indispensable word. 'It occurs one hundred times in the Pauline corpus of letters, twice as frequently as in all the rest of the Christian scriptures' (Duffy 1993: 30). Remember that Paul's letters pre-date the gospel portraits of Jesus. Like the early preachers of the primitive kerygma, he must find a way to proclaim the revolutionary turn that history has made in Jesus Christ. For Paul, that turn is a radical graciousness, an unmerited kindness on the part of God.

Paul does not seem to have used 'the word we translate as “grace” as a sharply defined concept, with a concern for theological consistency'. In fact, continues Cornelius Ernst, 'We might say that he used it poetically, meaning that under the pressure of powerful enthusiastic

feeling the word excited associations and even perhaps created them when Paul set about preaching the gospel of God's transcendent generosity to man in Jesus Christ' (1974: 19).

The most systematic treatment of his proclamation is found in his reflective letter to the Romans. There grace often appears more as adverb than as substantive, which is to say, as the manner in which God acts rather than as something God bestows. For example in Romans 3: 24 Paul writes, 'They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...' 'As a gift' is a translation of an adverbial phrase, amplifying the gratuitousness of God. Likewise in speaking of Abraham in Romans 4: 4, a single preposition *kata*, meaning 'as a matter of' or 'according to', the equivalent of the Latin *secundum*, is used twice, first juxtaposed with 'gift' and then with 'due' in order to emphasize God's gracious manner by contrast. 'Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due' (Ernst 1974: 20).

Perhaps the most trenchant recapitulation of the Pauline understanding of grace is the 'Apostolic Benediction' of 2 Corinthians 13: 13. 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.' C. Ryder Smith writes, 'This is a unique Farewell, but it epitomizes the Christian faith, and its three phrases, which are descriptions of different facets of the same experience, follow the historical order. Initially a believer experienced "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ;" from this, he learnt both "the love of God" and "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit"' (1956: 59). Otto Pesch considers the passage to be Paul's virtual definition of grace (1983: 287).

In Paul, the Christ event is almost exclusively focused upon the death and resurrection of Jesus, which Paul views as the great sign of God's favor. '[E]ven when the phrase "the grace of God" occurs without explicit mention of Christ, the context shows that Paul was thinking of the grace of God that comes through and from and in Christ (eg. 1 Cor. 3: 10; 2 Cor. 6: 1; Gal. 1: 15; Eph. 2: 7; Col. 1: 6; Titus 2: 11)' (Smith 1956: 60). In Paul grace is still more metaphor than metaphysics, and the metaphors he employs in speaking of grace thus include 'a mode of being, a regime, an economy, a dispensation which, at least in principle, encompasses all of humanity' (Duffy 1993: 35). As Ernst notes, 'It is not as though we were to

itemize God's gifts and call one of them "grace:" it is rather that "grace" qualifies the whole of God's self-communication as gift beyond all telling. We might call "grace" a *second level* concept, one which indicates a wholly new dimension of relationship between God and his creation, a transposition of the relationship between Creator and creature into a new mode' (1974: 29).

In view of Christ, grace seems intrinsic to human nature itself, and therefore universally ordered, but Pauline thought also lays the foundation for the clearly Christian contention that grace accomplishes the triptych of justification, sanctification, and salvation through *acceptance*. 'A gift is not a gift until it has been accepted.' Here C. Ryder Smith's *The Bible Doctrine of Grace* deserves to be quoted at length:

There are no passages where grace is said to be given to all men. The three nearest are Rom. 3: 22–4; 5: 17 ff, Titus 2: 11, for the word 'all' is found in them. In the first, however, while 'all' occurs with the meaning 'all men' in a parenthesis about sinners, the phrase 'being justified freely by his grace' refers back to 'all them *that believe*.' There is, however, the implication that 'grace' is *offered* to all men. Similarly, in the second passage the 'abundance of grace' is offered 'unto all men to justification of life.' The preferable translation of the third is 'The grace of God hath appeared to all men, bringing salvation' (cf. 1 Tim. 1: 15)—i.e. it is *offered* to all men. It is sometimes said that 'grace' is 'love at work,' rather, it is 'love successfully at work.' While God '*loves* the world' of 'perishing' sinners, His '*grace*' needs to be 'received' (John 3: 16, 1: 16). In other words, while God's 'love' is not perfected unless men respond, His 'grace' in Paul's use of the word, does not operate at all where there is no response. (1956: 60–1)

Already in Paul one finds a paradoxical duality that will be decisive and divisive for Christian thought. Grace must somehow be *within* humanity to have any significance, but what significance does it ultimately have if it is not the acceptance of something *more than* the human? Paul wants to insist that something both highly selective and ultimately universal has occurred in the Christ event. The stone rejected-but-becoming the cornerstone is thus the perfect image for the Pauline economy of grace. *Charis* and its cognates 'are not set in contrast to nature or creation (as the natural and the supernatural would be contrasted in later theology) but to sin and helplessness (cf. Rom. and Gal.)' (Duffy 1993: 38). In fact, Paul shows no interest

in the notion of a human nature considered apart from Christ. One might say that, given what Paul considers to have occurred in the Christ event, such a consideration would seem superfluous at best. ‘New Testament anthropology, and Pauline in particular, always contemplates the being of the human person in the light of God; it is not interested in the concept of the human person “in se,” perhaps because of the silent persuasion that this human being doesn’t exist’ (Ladaria 1983: 97).

A fundamental tension between Christianity and its interlocutors is thus evident in the earliest Christian use of the word ‘grace’, a fruitful tension in the search for the meaning of the word. Henri de Lubac beautifully captures early Christianity’s self-comprehension of being graced, vis-à-vis the pagan world, when he suggests that the latter lacked the theological virtue of hope because nothing radically new was to be expected from the divine (cf. Pelikan 1971: 281). The pagan cosmos was a realm of static, timeless order not a place of encounter, and, without the concept of history, hope has no meaning. One can have no hope of nature. Nature will always do what nature has always done.

That the latter lacked hope was primarily because the very idea of a *sursum* and a superabundance, the idea of an order incommensurate with nature, the idea of something radically new, something we might call an ‘invention in being,’ the idea of a gift coming gratuitously from above to raise up that needy nature, at once satisfying its longings and transforming it—such an idea remains wholly foreign to all whose minds have not been touched by the light of revelation. (de Lubac 1967: 130)

Ladaria aptly summarizes the foundational Christian understanding of grace in writing, ‘[I]t’s clear that for the New Testament grace is not primarily something that the human person possesses, but rather the benevolent activity of God, realized and manifested in Christ, who is the font of salvation for humanity’ (1983: 276). Another way of saying the same is to insist that the first thing grace must create or accomplish is a world that is fundamentally one of history rather than nature. History suggests contingency, freedom, decision, and denouement. Nature implies order, stasis, and causal determination. Christianity cannot be preached to nature; it addresses history. If grace were an object, one would naturally want to locate it either within nature, or

vis-à-vis nature. But grace is an event, and history is its milieu. The fundamental metaphorical nexus is of time, not space.

## 2.2 DEFENDING THE *NOVUM*

### 2.2.1 *Charis vs. gnosis*

Only if one correctly understands the *novum* of the Christian message, the perception that humanity has been made the recipient of the most fundamental favor that God could conceivably bestow, namely God's self, can one accurately perceive the threat to Christianity's *charis* that the *gnosis* of Gnosticism posed through the variegated, occult religious movements that surrounded the early Christian Church. Just as the concept of grace would perfectly encapsulate Christianity's perception of divine favor, the usage of the word *gnosis* (knowledge) incarnates its fundamental antithesis. The concept of grace that emerges from the New Testament is the human apperception of God's favor. The initiative is God's. God acts; humanity reacts. *Gnosis*, on the other hand, presents the human subject as fundamentally in control of the noetic process: God becomes the object of the human person's search. Direction of the noetic drive passes from the divine to the human, and God becomes reduced to a pursued object of human cognition. The same dichotomy that anthropologists note between authentic religion and magic, that of surrender to the mystery versus manipulation of it, is played out in the noetic arena between *charis* and *gnosis*.

This is quite evident from the role that ritual plays in each movement. Christianity viewed its adherents as a *plebs sancta* and threw open the previously sacrosanct (meaning 'to cut off the holy') temple precincts. Basilicas, which had served as assembly halls, became architectural statements of the new faith's essential inclusiveness. This was a *gratuitous* revelation, one intrinsically ordered toward proclamation (Bouyer 1967).

In contrast, the Gnostic cults met in secrecy. There the divine was an object to be hunted down, mastered. An open, public proclamation of the knowledge received through the cult would have enervated its

power, which necessarily demanded secrecy. The early Christian liturgy did practice a *disciplina arcana*, a keeping hidden of its deepest secrets to adherents, but this was essentially a proleptic secrecy, one designed to draw others in. The fundamental movement of the early liturgy was evangelical, missionary. In contrast, Gnosticism obviously wanted to admit new adherents, but it never saw itself as the possessor or herald of a message addressed to the world. Gnosticism was an attempt to control the world by accessing occult, divine power. Letting the entire world in on the secret would have rendered it flaccid.

### 2.2.2 Plato and patristic thought

In his historical treatment of grace in early Christianity, J. N. D. Kelly noted:

It must be admitted that, as compared with the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers as a whole are not greatly preoccupied with sin... Although satisfied that Christ died for us (often the repetition of the formula has a conventional ring), they assign a relatively minor place to the atoning value of His death. What looms larger in their imagination is the picture of Christ as the lawgiver, the bestower of knowledge, immortality and fellowship with God. (1977: 165)

The *Sitz-im-leben* of the earliest patristic writers helps to explain their focus. They must counter the threat of Gnosticism with what they consider to be the only true gnosis: the penetration of the gospel message into the core of the human person, which results in illumination and divinization.<sup>7</sup>

It should come as no surprise that divinization is explicitly linked to illumination, despite the Gnostic threat. If divinization is the result of proclamation, an encounter with the gospel, it must fundamentally be a noetic process.<sup>8</sup> Like the concepts of the world and

<sup>7</sup> Peter C. Phan (1988) offers a good overview of the struggle between patristic thought and Gnosticism. The Fathers insist that it is imitation of Christ, the divine image of God, that sanctifies and illumines.

<sup>8</sup> Which would seem to be a core teaching of Trent's *Decree on Justification*. Chapter VI asserts that 'Adults are disposed for that justice when, awakened and

history, the notion of illumination will remain a crucial element in the search for the meaning of the word ‘grace’. For Christianity, grace is a consequence of the gospel, and the gospel is a proclamation, something essentially ordered toward knowledge.

‘But the audience to which Christian thought was directed increasingly, and then almost exclusively, during the second and third centuries was one to which very little of the New Testament had been addressed’ (Pelikan 1971: 27). Thus early Christian thinkers had little choice but to step into a Platonic philosophical world for, as Anthony Gottlieb notes in *The Dream of Reason*, ‘For the first twelve centuries of the Christian era, the *Timaeus* formed the basis of most cosmology in the West. Indeed from the fifth century AD onwards, partial Latin translations of it provided the only generally available systematic account of nature until the scientific works of Aristotle, among others, were translated in to Latin in the twelfth century’ (2000: 204). Yet, despite its profound beauty, the cosmos of Plato was truly alien to the Christian message.

The main differences between Plato’s God and the biblical one are these: his God is not the most important thing in the universe (the forms are, and God must take his cues from them); he is not the only God but has many assistants; he is not omnipotent but must co-operate with various natural forces; he did not create the universe from scratch but used materials that were already to hand; he has no particular interest in people—in fact he gave the job of making them to his juniors in order to keep them at arm’s length. (Gottlieb 2000: 204)

For Plato, the natural world of change, growth, and decay could offer no permanence. Something had to stand behind or beyond the world, offering it not only stability but meaning as well. This Plato found in the idea of the eternal good, his name for God. God and the eternal ideas of God, which are the governing forms of the human world, stand as the *one* that unites the *many*. They stand, however, beyond the world in which humans dwell, a fundamental departure from the biblical worldview as M.-D. Chenu explains:

assisted by divine grace, they *conceive faith from hearing* [cf. Rom. 10: 17] and are freely led to be God, believing to be true what has been divinely revealed and promised ...’ (DS 1526; ND 1930; my italics).



For the Greeks, the problem of the origin of things was posed in terms of a dualism between matter and idea: idea or form organized primitive chaos into a cosmos; time played no part in this organizing activity as such. For the Hebrews, for Old Testament metaphysics, if one may so call it, the world was not envisaged as an analogue of a work of manual art; the problem of the relations between form and matter did not arise; the notions of cosmos and of nature were missing. (1997: 59–60)

Plato saw the task of the soul to be that of a progressive assimilation to God. Although ‘the Platonic God sometimes seems to be as abstract and impersonal as the Form of the Good and not like a personal being at all; the two seem at least to be in very close relations’ (Gottlieb 2000: 207). ‘The *Theaetetus* and the *Republic* speak respectively of assimilation to God and of our becoming “by practice of virtue likened to God to the extent possible for a human”’ (Duffy 1993: 65–6). The question needing to be posed is why the human person, the one divided within the self by a myriad of flux, should seek or desire that which is eternal. If the human person is a composite of the many, why do we yearn for the one? Why do we ‘remember’ that which we have never found in this world and that which this world cannot offer? Because the world for Plato is a dark cave that obscures the only true reality, the divine conceived as the good.

Duffy notes the carefully considered contrast that Christianity would offer to Platonist anthropology:

The Greek Fathers evidence a critical use of Platonism, even a reaction against it. . . . Divinization is not an achievement of the philosophical soul; it is the work of God’s grace. This theme is constantly replayed. For Plato the soul is divine, akin to the divine realm of the forms, where it belongs. The soul’s slow ascent is a process of becoming what it truly is by realizing its innate divinity. Some patristic texts echo this. But careful reading shows that the Fathers did not uncritically make their own the Platonist premise of the soul’s kinship with the divine. The weight of Christian tradition was thrown against it. (1993: 66)

And with good reason! As de Lubac would insist in his reading of the period, the Christian ethos fundamentally reordered the Greek. Deification for the Christian is not the solution to the dissolution apparent in Platonic nature. Having reveled in revelation, Christianity asserts that nature exists in order to be deified.

There is, however, an affinity shared by the Platonic worldview and the Christian concept of grace in the concept of revelation. Both suggest that something not ordinarily found within the world has been made manifest, or can be made manifest, to the world. Both direct the attention of the one seeking enlightenment beyond the flux of the surrounding world. Yet beneath these similarities lies a more fundamental division. In Plato the divine reawakens from the slumber of the world; it steps out from behind the world. It does not engage or love the world. The world is its occluding dross, so the divine is to be encountered by shunning the world.<sup>9</sup> This world must dissolve into the reality that is the divine. In contrast, Christianity's grace is not the sloughing off of an illusory dream; it is an awakening to the caress of a lover, one seeking engagement.

Still, Plato's view of the sacred lying hidden, beyond the world, was similar to Christianity's view of a sacred that was latent, and has now been made manifest, within the world.<sup>10</sup> Yet conflating the two would have led to a fundamental abandonment of Christianity's essential proclamation of God's favor. That Christian discourse on grace could be Platonized without losing its distinctive, elective character is due to the biography and writing of a single, graced soul, Augustine of Hippo, the *doctor gratiae*.

### 2.2.3 Love's dramatist

If language after Wittgenstein is essentially the creation of fecund dichotomies, Augustine earned his reputation as a rhetorician. The trenchant, personal dichotomy incessantly pricking the young Augustine was the need to explain not only the evil in the world

<sup>9</sup> And one should add that the material world, the one we experience, is a dross that emanates from the divine; it is not the result of God's creative action. See Flick and Alszeghy (1982: 26–7 and 46–7) for a recapitulation of the patristic rejection of Platonistic emanation. It should be noted that the world's emanation from the divine was taken up again by post-Enlightenment, Hegelian philosophy, leading to the First Vatican Council's reiteration of divine freedom in the act of creation (DS 3002; ND 412).

<sup>10</sup> Even Augustine, who was to champion Paul over Plato, would grant that Platonist writings 'conveyed in every possible way, albeit indirectly, the truth of God and his Word' (*Conf.* VIII. 2. 3).

but also, and in particular, the evil he found exposed within himself. 'And so the two wills fought it out—the old and the new, the one carnal, the other spiritual—and in their struggle tore my soul apart' (*Conf.* VIII. 5. 10).

The solution at hand was Manicheism, with its teaching that reality is ultimately reducible into two, opposing centers of energy, one good, the other evil. Manicheism presumes upon the static world of prerevelatory thought. As such, it suggests that the human drama, the evil that humans inflict, suffer, and (hopefully) survive transformed, is essentially illusion. In Manicheism, the drama of human life is projected out of the world in which humans dwell (but not out of the world constructed by human thought) and into the sphere of the cosmic, where opposing deities duel as principles of good and evil. Manicheism, under the influence of Eastern thought, refocuses the drama of the human world onto a cosmic scrim. Human strife thus gives way to divine warfare, but even in Manicheism the polarities in the divine eventually reveal themselves as necessary dualities therein. They are ephemeral and thus illusory moments in the stasis of an unchanging absolute. Manicheism seemed to suggest that good and evil were at war within the world of humans. Yet the resolution of that warfare, the return to stasis, was simply the dissolution of the disillusion that is the human world.

Ultimately Manicheism is an interpretation of nature, not of history. It says that human history is not really history, which is to say that it is not an arena of free action. It is only the result of two opposing principles, neither of which ever truly alters. As such, it is simply dualistic nature, or nature dichotomized, but, if dichotomies ceaselessly perdure, they dissolve into regularity, and hence into the concept of pure nature.

Manicheism offered the promise of intellectually dissolving evil, and one should not quickly disparage the nobility of the *apatheia* that it could evoke: humans surrender to that which lies beyond their control, because what lies 'beyond' is ultimately beyond the realm of freedom. What is good, what is evil, when all is determined? If what is, simply is, neither the pursuit of the good nor the avoidance of evil is an existential option. The moral life comes to rest in, or one might say is reduced to, *apatheia*.

The difficulty is that humans experience their world as one open to the drama that is human freedom. Augustine could affirm the notion that nature could not be called to account for itself (he distinguished between ontological and moral evil), but he could not accept the loathing that he found within himself. His personal decisions could not be reduced to illusion. Nature didn't require a redeemer; history, his own in particular, did.

Thus in the seventh book of his *Confessions* Augustine would banish the entire world of Platonic emanations from Christian discourse with the employment of a single word, 'Tu'. When he encountered the world, he met another. 'But in those days, after reading the books of the Platonists and following their advice to seek for truth beyond corporeal forms, I turned my gaze toward your invisible reality, trying to understand it through created things, and though I was rebuffed I did perceive what that reality was which the darkness of my soul would not permit me to contemplate. I was certain that you exist, that you are infinite'—emanation yields to encounter—'but not spread out through space either finite or infinite, and that you exist in the fullest sense because you have always been the same, unvarying in every respect and in no wise subject to change' (20. 26).

Augustine was convinced that a dialogical 'you' had sought him out, one revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. For the future Bishop of Hippo the gratuity of the Christ reorders and crowns the gratuity of creation as a free act. He continues: 'All other things I saw to have their being from you, and for this I needed but one unassailable proof—the fact that they exist. On these points I was quite certain, but I was far too weak to enjoy you. Yet I readily chattered as though skilled in the subject, and had I not been seeking your way in Christ our Savior, I would more probably have been killed than skilled.'<sup>11</sup>

In the scriptures, grace had not yet acquired a metaphysical status and therefore didn't stand in need of a metaphysical explication. Only with Augustine's polemic against Pelagius does grace become 'a focal point of explicit theological reflection' (Duffy 1993: 17).

<sup>11</sup> To see how thoroughly the Christ event reorders, by way of revelation, the gratuity of creation for Augustine, see Book XIII of the *Confessions*, where Genesis is rewritten in a Christian key. God not only creates the world; in the allegorical reading of Augustine, he establishes the Christian economy of salvation in the same act.

Then, like so much else in Augustine, the antinomies pour forth with passion. As Bernard Lonergan noted, 'The early medieval theologians tended to multiply terms with respect to grace not so much to denote differences of meaning as to keep pace with the facility of St Augustine's rhetoric' (2000: 128). What sets Augustine apart from his contemporaries in late Roman civilization was his passion. Augustine was a lone heart, not a solitary genius. With each generation of scholarship, his antecedents in philosophy are known with greater precision.<sup>12</sup> Yet we owe the Church's retention of the Pauline poignancy of grace to Augustine alone; he saved it by rewriting it in a key of love.<sup>13</sup>

One way of viewing Augustine's personal odyssey, and the rhetoric of grace that it produced, is to see Augustine the man as the great champion in a drama of love, and Augustine, the theologian of grace, as love's dramatist. 'This, for the Bishop of Hippo, is the grace of the new covenant: the attachment of our inner being to the loving kindness of God, a joyful delight in the ambience of God's self-bestowal, and a new being and a new love. The grace of the new dispensation is an energy of love recognized as pure gift' (Duffy 1993: 79). Augustine will not allow the drama of a revelatory, transforming encounter to be siphoned away from the Christian proclamation. The thrall of grace will not be quelled, which is what its domestication into any philosophical system inevitably threatens.

For Augustine grace must stand for a real intrusion of the divine into the human. It is a place of encounter. It possesses what might be called a 'nuptial' character. It is an awareness of the other who is not the self and yet calls to the self. '[I] was quite sure that surrendering myself to your love would be better than succumbing to my lust, but while the former course commended itself and was beginning to conquer, the latter charmed and chained me' (*Conf.* VIII. 5. 12). Basil Studer is surely correct when he says that Augustine's world is

<sup>12</sup> See TeSelle (1970: 43–55) for an overview of those influences.

<sup>13</sup> TeSelle (1970: 156) dates Augustine's explicit interest in the Pauline epistles to 394. 'In quick succession Augustine wrote an *Exposition of Eighty-Four Propositions on the Epistle to the Romans*, then an *Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*, then an unfinished *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, as well as discussion of Pauline problems in questions 66 through 68 of the collection of responses to various questions.'

Christocentric. We cannot understand the Bishop of Hippo without understanding that ‘for Augustine everything is God’s grace and that the incarnation in particular is the greatest of all graces’ (1997: 60; cf. TeSelle 1970: 336).

To encounter the Other is to find the self, because love reveals the self as ordered toward completion in the other (*De bea.* IV. 34). In this sense the Other is always, properly speaking, something of a redeemer, because life without the Other is only the possibility of life, not its fruition. To love is always to realize that one must go out of self toward the Other in order to become one’s own self. It is not optional, except in the sense that one can fail at the great endeavor, refuse to meet the challenge. To realize that one loves, however, demands completion in the other. Hence, once the object of love is revealed, engagement with it, and its openness to engagement in return, literally determine one’s own self-project. What stronger definition does one need of a redeemer? To love another is always to grant him or her that role. ‘Viewing the matter psychologically,’ Roger Haight writes, ‘as Augustine himself does, by reorienting our elemental desire, interest and delight, as well as our understanding of being over which we have little control, the touch of grace not only reconstitutes our person but also our freedom of decision in a qualitatively new way; it gives “personhood” and its ability to posit the self an entirely new and absolute dimension’ (1979: 48). No one can hope to understand Augustine without pondering the terribly salient fact that his great masterpiece, *The Confessions*, is not simply an autobiography. It is a love letter, addressed to a ‘You’.

‘Grace for Augustine was delight in the good, a new form of liberty that required an internal modification of the human will. No one prior to Augustine had really asserted anything quite like this need for an inner working of God within freedom’ (Haight 1979: 36). For the Bishop of Hippo, grace is ‘healed desire’, the desire that heals through reorientation toward the beloved.<sup>14</sup> Roger Haight notes the distinction that Augustine would draw between freedom and liberty.

<sup>14</sup> TeSelle (1970: 111): ‘Like the movement away from God, the movement back toward God is a change not of place but of affection (*De mor.* I, II, 19; *De mus.* VI, 13, 40).’ See also *De pecc. mer.* II. 19. 32; *De spir. et litt.* 29, 51; *De Gen. c. Man.* II. II. 15; *De serm. Dom. in monte* I. 12. 34; *Exp. ep. ad Gal.* 49.

The former is of the very essence of human nature; the latter is a gift of the gospel. ‘Freedom or free will (*librum arbitrium*) is the power to choose this or that; liberty (*libertas*) is the power to choose the transcendent good and stems from an inner “delight” in the good, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, that is grace’ (Haight 1979: 47).

In suggesting that human beings require only the *knowledge*, which revelation offers, but not an active interpenetration of the divine and the human, a divine coming to the aid of the human, Pelagianism, Augustine’s end-life foe, likewise threatened the core of the Christian economy of salvation by undermining its anthropology and cosmology. For Augustine, human love stands in need of a redeemer, and the world itself is a dramatic locus of encounter. In reducing the Christ event to a manifestation of knowledge, here transposed from the Gnostic realm of esoteric mystery into the Stoic sphere of moral teaching, Pelagianism remained within the pre-Christian worldview of a cosmos complete within itself.

For Pelagius, the task of human transformation, for the well-intentioned non-believer as well as for the Christian, is essentially the Platonic trek toward enlightenment. In the Neoplatonic thought of the late fourth century, what has emanated from the divine should with moral effort make its way back to the divine. But an emanation is not an encounter; it is only a moment in what we would today call an evolution. Once again, the prerevelatory concept of nature tries to evict history. Evolution is nature unfolding. History is self-determination, and Augustine came to its defense. ‘More than anything else, it was the controversy with Pelagius, Julian of Eclanum, and others, in which his teaching on grace was challenged, that compelled him to differentiate between “the gift that is nature itself” (*gratia naturae*) and “the grace by which we are made believers” (*gratiae fidelium*)’ (Studer 1997: 5).

But what exactly is the *gratiae fidelium*? How does it differ from the *gratiae naturae*, which is another way of asking what self-understanding separates the Christian appropriation of the world from that of others? If the world itself is graced, if it is itself an act of grace, what is the role of grace within the world? What does it mean for Augustine to experience grace? Why is this signal experience so threatened by Pelagianism, which sees everything as having been given in a single gift, at the dawn of creation?

Augustine will reinforce the biblical apperception of divine favor, but for him, in the light of the Christ event, this favoring is nothing less than a divine–human nuptial. ‘The words of Paul about “the love of God poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5: 5) may well have been Augustine’s favorite passage from scripture, quoted over and over, also in the treatises against Pelagianism’ (Pelikan 1984: 252). In Augustine grace becomes personal, which is to say that it addresses the human being and awaits a response. The Church for Augustine is that response. It is constituted by lovers:

[H]e that loves the sons of God, loves the Son of God, and he that loves the Son of God, loves the Father, nor can any love the Father except he love the Son, and he that loves the sons, loves also the Son of God. What sons of God? The members of the Son of God. And by loving he becomes himself a member, and comes through love to be in the frame of the body of Christ, so there shall be one Christ, loving Himself. (*Epis. Ioan. X. 3*)

Love is a noetic reality, a way of being in the world. The human person does not survey the world with Cartesian objectivity. He or she is always drawn toward the world, toward some distinctive element within the world. This drawing conforms and patterns the world to itself as focal point. Anyone who has ever been in love knows that the entire world has been remade with the advent of the beloved.

For Augustine, we were made to love, to yearn. We *cannot not* love. The question is whether we dissipate love in the lesser, or yearn for the *sursum*. At every moment, desire remains a fundamental noetic reality, what Heidegger would later call an existential, a foundational way of being human within the world. Even in base loves, something of love’s truth prevails. ‘An impure, evil-loving man loves a beautiful woman. The body’s beauty moves him, but within it is the exchange of love (*amoris vicissitudo*) that is wanted’ (*Serm. 34*). If he is spurned, he loses his love. ‘But if he sees his love returned (*vicissim amatur*), how much more intensely will he burn? She sees him and he her; no one sees the love. Yet that very thing (love) which is not seen is loved.’ Augustine is proleptically preaching Aquinas. All human activity is dependent upon that which is pure act, love itself. Even disordered base loves (and it is precisely their dis-ordering that makes them base) still partake of the divine act of being.



Reflecting on his arrival in Carthage as a youth, Augustine wrote, 'So I arrived in Carthage, where the din of scandalous love-affairs raged cauldron-like around me. I was not yet in love, but I was enamored with the idea of love, and so deep within me was my need that I hated myself for the sluggishness of my desires. *In love with loving*, I was casting about for something to love' (*Conf.* III. 1. 1). All this concerns sinful love, but in the sermon cited above he also says: 'There is no one who does not love; the question is what are we to love. We are not urged not to love, but to choose what to love' (*Serm.* 34). Love is an enrichment of being; it completes the self. It must be rediscovered, illumined, intensified in love of God. 'One loves Thee less who loves something else together with Thee, which is not loved because of Thee. O Love, always burning and never quenched, set me on fire' (*Serm.* 34)! Love is the soul's secret life begotten in the exchange of love. Love bestows being itself. It is both noetic and ontological, given the post-linguistic understanding that the two can never be adequately distilled.

In his theological masterpiece *The Trinity*, Augustine's own odyssey of love, his historical journey, and not the Greek metaphysics of nature, is used to define the very experience and nature of God.

Let no one say, 'I do not know what to love.' Let him love his brother, and love that love; after all, he knows the love he loves better than the brother he loves. There now, he can already have God better known to him than his brother, certainly better known because more present, better known because more inward to him, better known because more sure. Embrace love which is God, and embrace God with love. This is the love which unites all the good angels and all servants of God in a bond of holiness, conjoins us and them together, and subjoins us to itself. And the more we are cured of the tumor of pride, the fuller we are of love. And if a man is full of love, what is he full of but God? (*De Trin.* VIII. 12)<sup>15</sup>

Note that love has both a personal and a noetic character. It is an event, an encounter with a person. It is also a way of seeing, a reordering of noetic elements. This is why Augustine will speak of love as light,

<sup>15</sup> Even more succinctly, 'Thus it is that in this question we are occupied with about the trinity and about knowing God, the only thing we really have to see is what true love is; well in fact, simply what love is.' *De Trin.* VIII. 5. 10.

and why he so often uses both light and love as metaphors for God. If one understands Augustine, love is light, because love is God and participation in God is that which allows for participation in the world. In Book VII of *The Trinity*, Augustine will use light as the fundamental metaphor of our Christic participation in God. We are illumined in Christ, and Christ is the self-illumination of the Godhead. 'For we too are the image of God, though not the equal one like him; we are made by the Father through the Son, not born of the Father like that image; we are image because we are illuminated with light; that one is so because it is the light that illuminates, and therefore it provides a model for us without having a model itself.'<sup>16</sup>

For Augustine, Christians were participants in an axial action of God, one so decisive as to drive theologians to bestow metaphysical status upon grace. The problem arises with the choice of metaphysical elements that the Greek tradition could offer. In the Aristotelian frame of reference, 'relation' is the weakest of the categories of being, a *debellissimum ens*. This remains true even if the relation in question is that uniquely human apex of relationship, love. Relationship tends to cloud the purity of the self-subsisting *substance* in Greek thought. As David Burrell notes, 'relation remains the most elusive of Aristotle's categories, not properly an accident for its being is not *in* but *ad*; which is to say that it does not exist *in* another so much as "between" the *relata*' (1986: 23).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, in the ordered and essentially static world of nature, relationship is understood as a conceptual quality which the human mind *infers* upon reality.

<sup>16</sup> *De Trin.* VII. 2. 5. In his note on the passage, Edmund Hill writes, 'In Augustine's view the word "light" is not applied to God, or to the spiritual creation metaphorically, but properly. This is clear every time he discusses the verse *God said, "Let there be light" and there was light* (Gen. 1: 3). For him light is a transcendental idea, like "being"; there is uncreated light, which is God, and there is created light, which is the participation by creatures in the uncreated light, and is spiritual and physical (his word is *corporalis*) according to the nature of the creature participating' (Augustine 1991: 234).

<sup>17</sup> He adds, 'Medievals, to be sure, tried to minimize the ontological scandal by focusing on the qualities of the subjects so related, so finding *accidental* correlates for particular relations. And that is of course the case: to be differently related is to become a different person in recognizable respects. Yet relating cannot be translated into those changes without remainder.'

So the axial decisiveness of the Christian message suffered some when translated into Greek categories. Grace, which began its Judeo-Christian life as an apperception of a relation, that of being favored by God, necessarily began to assume the character and status of a substance for the simple reason that in Greek thought *substance* is a greater expression of being than *relationship*. However, this metaphysical 'translation' was not neutral and carried strong theological repercussions, which must now be considered.

# 3

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## Retrieving the Dynamic Personalism of Aquinas

### 3.1 THE WORLD BEFORE THOMAS

#### 3.1.1 The nature of the world

Augustine kept the Christian usage of grace from being overwhelmed by the Platonism of the late empire, but it was Thomas Aquinas who ultimately reoriented Christian thought from a Platonist to an Aristotelian worldview.<sup>1</sup> Like Augustine, Aquinas found a way to express the gospel's novelty, or the novelty that is the gospel, in an altered philosophical context. His achievement requires several retrievals to correct contemporary misconceptions about grace. The first will consider the meaning of the word 'nature' in Thomas's thought, which will raise the question of God's relationship to the world; the second will be an examination of Thomas's use of the Greek concept of substance, which I view as ultimately a way of asking about the

<sup>1</sup> It shouldn't be surprising that an author as prolific and foundational as Aquinas should be subject to constant reevaluation. See Clarke (1994) for a review of the Thomistic literature challenging the notion that Aristotle remains the overwhelmingly dominant philosophical source of Aquinas.

What is beyond doubt, and foundational to this essay, is Aquinas's radical sublation of Aristotelian philosophy with the notion that being itself is an *act* rather than a given. What Victor Preller says of the *Summa* is equally applicable to the entire Thomistic corpus (2004: 262–3): 'Any reader should be struck at once by the fact that the entire framework of the *Summa*, that which gives it its basic structure and order, is radically theological and non-Aristotelian. The basic structure is that of the emergence of all things from God, and of the return of all things to God. The Neoplatonic model of emanation from God, and return to God (the *exitus* and *reditus*) controls the structure and the overarching message of the *Summa*.'

human person's relationship to the world; and the third, concluding retrieval is an examination of the neglected noetic character of grace, or how it is that the world itself begins to speak.

Johann Baptist Metz has argued persuasively that Aquinas represents an axial moment in Western thought. In his work *Christliche Anthropozentrik: Über die Denkform des Thomas von Aquin*, Metz suggested that, under the impulse of the Christian gospel, Aquinas inaugurated a shift in Christian, and Western, thought from the dominion of a Greek, object-centered and essentially static, cosmos to the anthropologically centered concerns of modern thought, which focus upon history rather than nature. 'Succinctly put, Greek thought-form is cosmocentric; the Thomistic anthropocentric.'<sup>2</sup> It helps to briefly examine just how radical Aquinas's turn from nature to history was.

In the dominant strands of Greek thought, every element of the world already possesses an eternally fixed relationship to every other element in the world, simply by being a member of the world. Intraworldly relations vary, but the perimeters of the world itself remain fixed. The name designating the dynamism of intraworldly variations, dissolving before the stasis that is the world, is 'nature'. Modern speakers still employ this concept of the world when we speak of nature as governing, controlling, and ultimately explaining the world around us. Why is the world a purposeful pattern of existence? Because *nature* governs it. The world itself then requires no intrasystemic explanation beyond the discovered, or discoverable, laws of nature. To ask 'what governs nature?' is to fail to understand the role the word plays in the language game of explanation. When someone says 'it's nature's way' or 'this is a law of nature', another cannot respond by requesting further causal investigation, because in this language game nature grounds causality. As Wittgenstein would note, a basic pattern of human thought has been followed, and the question of purposefulness has come to rest upon the foundation of nature. 'What happens is not that this symbol cannot be further interpreted, but: I do no interpreting. I do not interpret, because I feel

<sup>2</sup> Metz 1962: 47. Pesch likewise notes that Aquinas begins his treatment of grace, not with an abstract consideration of its nature, but with an understanding of the human person as sinful, and therefore as existentially standing-in-need (1983: 37–8).

at home in the present picture' (1967: 43; §234). Even in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein recognized that nature is a synthetic concept, not a referential object. 'Thus people today stop at laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable, just as God and Fate were treated in past ages. And in fact both are right and both wrong; though the view of the ancients is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if everything were explained' (1961: 70; §6.372).

The unique role that nature plays in our way of life is aptly illustrated with the consideration that every scientific theorem presumes upon the existence of nature, and yet nature *per se* cannot be made the object of scientific scrutiny. What nature itself might be, whether it is an element within the world or something that transcends the world, is no longer a question. Nature is simply the fundamental meaning of the scientific world, and the question does not arise as to whether the world bestows meaning upon nature or vice versa. Even the most fundamental question, that of contingency or non-contingency, cannot be raised. One cannot reasonably ask if nature 'has to be'. Nature is that linguistic place where the discussion rests; it is a heuristic instrument, not an entity.

When one understands the language game afoot, the Greek discovery of nature could just as easily be called the Greek invention of nature. The use of either word should not obscure the debt that Western thought owes to the Greek mind, which saw the world as a cosmos ordered by a pattern of purposeful causes that could be studied and manipulated. Remember that the alternative was animism, viewing the world as the unfathomable arena of capricious spirits whom one might placate, but never comprehend.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Gottlieb rather aptly illustrates the contribution of Greek philosophy on this issue (2000: 206): 'The sort of purposes which Plato wanted to invoke were in one important sense the exact opposite of what the myth-makers had been talking about. The trouble with the pseudo-explanations of the *theologi* was that the gods they introduced were capricious. Poseidon caused earthquakes because he felt like it. Such events were therefore impossible to predict or to fit into any general pattern. So science was impossible. But the purposes which Plato found in nature were much more rational than Poseidon's whims, and the whole point of looking for them was to establish an overall pattern and thus a genuine science. Plato did not debase the art of rational explanation by conjuring up gods to account for particular everyday events.'

The problem for the Christian is that the human person cannot enter into dialogue with nature, cannot relate to nature as to a person, even though, for the romantics of the nineteenth century as well as for the pre-Thomistic scholastics of the twelfth, the concept of nature glided easily into the concept of God.<sup>4</sup> But the God who governs nature is not a personal God. This God does not address the human being. This God is not an interlocutor, which is the etymological root of the word ‘person’ in Greek thought. The human person is immersed in the skein of nature, just like any other object. In this sense, nature seems to coincide with the world itself, and therefore any numinous relationship is banished to a realm beyond the world (of nature). The Greek cosmos thus represented both a noetic advance for the empiricism of science and a retreat for human interaction with the divine. ‘The Greeks were much more at home with the idea of divinity, a set of qualities that are found in nature, than with the idea of a God, a being wholly set apart from nature’ (Gottlieb 2000: 209). He continues, ‘[A]ll sorts of things were commonly called divine on account of their permanence, their power and their superiority to the characteristically human. The basic use of “divine” among the Greeks was to speak of such things. And the idea of a divine personal being derives from this usage, rather the other way round.’ The result? The divine no longer dwells in the mountains; it does not manifest itself in the storm; it cannot be appealed to by the employment of ritual. Its only relation to us is absence.<sup>5</sup>

Still, one might inchoately marvel at the beauty of nature. Inchoately, because even something like beauty seems to demand a converse,

<sup>4</sup> Chenu shows the challenge facing Thomas in his retrieval of a nature that could be ‘dialogical’ (1997: 1–48). The twelfth century had shown a marked revival of the Greek concept of nature. ‘From the middle of the century on, the “hierarchical” conception of the universe would cast over men’s minds a spell comparable to that cast by the scientific *mythos* of evolution in the nineteenth century. The key to the understanding of the universe, and of man in the universe, was taken to be the ordered, dynamic, and progressive chain of all beings—a chain in which causality and meaning fall together, and which each being is a “theophany,” a revelation of God.’

<sup>5</sup> See Elders (1965: 34–42) for a discussion of Greek religion’s relationship to Aristotle’s cosmology. Aristotle certainly thought the divine worthy of contemplation, and, though a lost manuscript speaks of prayer, it is unclear what this would have meant to the philosopher. At 41, ‘[I]n the last analysis religion is but a one-way movement of the human mind; it finds its coronation in the contemplation of the First Mover.’

and a converse creates a relationship, which is the beginning of language and hence incorporation into the world that is oriented toward history. One might wonder, and feel a sense of gratitude, that nature, and the human person within it, is fearfully, wonderfully made. But then, what would an unbeautiful nature look like? What would the words mean? Or, in another key, what would a less-purposeful nature mean? Yet something within the human mind is stirred to appreciate, to warm in response to, the ‘naturalness of nature’, to the beauty, or wonder, of nature simply being its own self. The Greek mind thus rises to the most fundamental apperception of grace, the grace of intellect.<sup>6</sup> Why is there nature (order) rather than no nature? Even more fundamentally, why is there something purposeful (*logos*) rather than chaos?

Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* arrives at the similar, though distinctive, pinnacle of contemplation, and one can see its foundations in Judeo-Christian discourse. He marvels not at nature but, like Aquinas before him, at the very act of existence. ‘It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists’ (1961: 73; §6.44). The world is silent because there is no way to bring into language its opposite. The ‘whole’ does not possess a converse. But then the question poses itself like a specter, why do we continue to wish that it did?

### 3.1.2 Emanation and illumination

Christianity insists that the *whole* that is the world stands before that which is not itself, the revelation of which reveals this self as still incomplete. Augustine’s successors in Neoplatonism proved unable to maintain adequately the dialogical, interpersonal character of grace that he had championed. The reason is simple enough. Grace in Neoplatonic thought is not the perception of love and the apperception that is love; it is emanation. The writings spanning the ages of Augustine and Aquinas are thoroughly imbued with Plotinian and pseudo-Dionysian hierarchies of being. The difficulty

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Thea.* (155d): ‘philosophy has no other starting point than the experience of wonder.’ Aristotle, *Meta.* (982b12–13): ‘For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize...’



for Christianity is that a hierarchy built upon passive emanation from one layer of the cosmos to another is not an active encounter between agents who are personal. As M.-D. Chenu notes, '[T]he psychological reality of grace and of free will, of the two liberties, God's and man's, which the Pelagian controversy established for good in the West, could not easily be fitted into the closed system of action required by the hierarchical destiny of created beings' (1997: 64).

The concept of hierarchy, he continues, 'locked up each nature within its own ontological perimeter. This concept entailed natures so universally and normally open to causal influence from the being above them that the action of that superior being was intimately involved in their own natural acts. This "sympathy," this *continuatio* as it was translated in Latin, was of a piece with the Plotinian idea of "participation;" it clothed reality with qualities deriving from a mysterious kinship and invested the unitary order of the universe, emanating from the One, with a religious value' (1997: 83). Albeit prescientific, nature serves as the all-encompassing noetic skein of the world, the grounding for all answers, but nature never questions itself. The wonder of the Western mind has waffled between contemplation of the act of existence (Why is there something rather than nothing?) to the pattern of existence (How wonderfully wrought is nature!).

It should not be surprising that the great metaphor for this understanding of grace would be that of the light, though not Augustine's light as active, personal love. 'The image of light was far more than a literary figure; it was the consistent effect of the metaphysics of emanation, which saw not only intelligence but nature itself as filled with the light of the supreme and motionless God and as becoming assimilated to the One through conscious or unconscious contemplation of it' (Chenu 1997: 52). Of course light is not only a Neoplatonic metaphor. It is biblical as well. 'Whether in St. Augustine or pseudo-Dionysius, in Alexandrian theology or the liturgy, one of the best established commonplaces of Christian thought is the connection seen between such "light" and Biblical uses of the image, all the way from religious exaltation of the sun in the Old Testament to the concept of the Logos, light of men. The entire stock of such commonplaces was common during the Middle Ages.'

Light is an obvious metaphor for the act of perception, since it enables it. The issue for Christianity lies in the conception of the divine, as being either active lover or passive source of hierarchical fullness. To push the metaphor to the point of distinction, the question is whether the light simply reveals the perfect ordering of the cosmos or attracts us to its very self as that which is other than the cosmos. Are we illumined in order to see the perfection, inherent in form, of the divine, or is illumination itself a dynamic, divine activity, one which alters what it illumines? Is the perfection a pattern that speaks?

The Neoplatonists who followed Augustine tended to follow Plato in making the good the highest of the Transcendentals, and the good, which is self-effusive, is ultimately the perfect ordering of form. Remember that Greek thought has indigenous roots. Chaos is the unlimited, the unformed. Form defines the cosmos and hence Being itself in Greek thought.<sup>7</sup> When Aquinas shifts primacy in the Transcendentals to the act of being, he ultimately suggests that illumination is an activity ordered toward communion, and not simply the revelation of the flawless stasis of the Greek cosmos.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For a perceptive discussion of Aquinas's relationship to his Greek inheritance on this question see Clarke (1994: 65–88). Commenting upon Aquinas's teaching on the simplicity of God, *ST I* q. 3, Burrell notes that the Greeks used language to bring order to chaos, to make of it a cosmos (1979: 14–16). Chaos is precisely that which cannot be defined and which therefore cannot be considered composite. Aquinas, on the contrary, will speak of God's simplicity, of God standing beyond the ability of language to define. To the Greek mind, such a deity is literally inconceivable, one could even say, unworthy of being divine. Yet God's being for Aquinas is not limited by his nature, nor his act of being by any potency. One can say that in Aquinas 'infinity' shifts from being that which defies reason to that which reason must most properly ascribe to the deity. At 18, 'Simpleness does not name a characteristic of God, but a formal feature of God as "beginning and end of all things." It is a shorthand term for saying that God lacks composition of any kind.'

<sup>8</sup> See Aertsen 1996: #489 for the leading discussion of Thomas and the Transcendentals. Most salient to the present discussion is at 185–6: 'One of Thomas's relatively rare "ego" statements concerns his understanding of being. "What I call *esse* is the most perfect of all." His argument is that act is always more perfect than potentiality. Now, any form, such as humanity or fire, is understood to exist actually only in virtue of the fact that it is held to *be*. "It is evident, therefore, that what I call *esse* is the actuality of all acts, and for this reason it is the perfection of all perfections." The distinctive feature of Thomas's understanding of being is the notion of "actuality." In his own judgment he differs in this respect from Aristotle, who conceived "being" as the quiddity of something.'

The Platonic division between the world of matter and the ideal world of forms introduced a dichotomy into Christian thought unknown to the biblical mind. In Plato the cosmos is ultimately one; each individual nature finds insertion into a hierarchy of natures, which is ordered toward the immaterial world of forms standing at the apex of the cosmos. What experiences division is the human person, who now becomes an ungainly dyad of gross material and an eternal soul. In pre-Thomistic anthropology, Chenu argues that

Man was composed of a body and a soul, and through these he entered into two worlds. The soul, in itself, was one, substantial, reasonable, and individual, even when it was ruling a body. (This definition prevailed throughout medieval philosophy, despite the success of Aristotelianism.) Man's dualism had implications for the ways and means by which he knew; the soul had two faces, one turned toward the intelligible world, the other toward the sense-perceptible world. (Chenu 1997: 62–3)

The soul in the Neoplatonism of the Middle Ages is no longer that of the biblical picture, an animating and God-directed principle of the body, the word designating our corporeal presence in the world. Rather, the soul becomes the prisoner of the body. 'All accepted the duality of the human mind, its face turned upwards toward ecstasy; and thus they deviated from the biblical monism, in which man was caught up in the drama of sin and grace in all his concrete reality, and in which God's action became incarnate in order to make contact with creation precisely in its physical reality' (Chenu 1997: 96).

In Plato, there is no need to speak of a 'supernature' when nature or the cosmos is itself a hierarchy. The cosmos is one, while dynamism is twofold, involving passive emanation from and reassimilation into the *arche*. Yet the term 'supernature' will come to seem indispensable in Christian Neoplatonism if one wants to maintain the dialogical character of biblical faith. A line of demarcation must be drawn to create the possibility of dialogue, and unfortunately that line will be drawn through the human person, not between dialogical partners. It will also leave him with an existential stake in two, separate realms: one, the material world around him with which he must be concerned if he is to survive and thrive; the other, the immaterial world awaiting him, which must also be his concern because he ultimately cannot thrive in a world destined to dissolve.

## 3.2 ACKNOWLEDGING THE *SURSUM*

### 3.2.1 What nature meant to Thomas

As Étienne Gilson always insisted, Thomas's thought is imbued with the metaphysics of Exodus. God simply is, while we are contingent. Therefore the world itself is revealed as contingent, open-ended, ready to respond to that which is not the self. This is the cosmic, yet interpersonal, dynamism that Thomas will have to account for in his treatment of grace. Perhaps in view of the later debates, which focused upon the necessity of maintaining a distinction between nature and supernature, it may surprise some to learn that 'St. Thomas clearly holds that the first man was created in grace because grace is necessary for original justice. It seems sufficiently clear, too, that for him this was a necessary, certain conclusion' (Van Roo 1955: 61).

One can see Thomas's adept handling of the nature/supernature dyad in his treatment of original justice, the prelapsarian state of humanity characterized by a threefold submission, by which the body was subject to the soul, the inferior powers of the human person were subject to the higher, and the higher powers, to God (*Sent.* II d. 20 q. 2 a. 3 sol.). Aquinas 'reconstructs' humanity's prelapsarian state, obviously not by direct examination, but rather by inverting our lapsarian condition. Our bodies do not perfectly serve the soul, and they are subject to decay and death. Furthermore, we suffer from concupiscence, the lack of integration that the human person experiences because of conflicting desires. Finally our inability to direct the will fully to God alienates us from divine life. All three conditions are resultant upon the Fall, and in our postlapsarian state grace has the task of healing them.

Yet Aquinas insists that the human person required grace before the Fall, because he sought to affirm both our destiny in God and the gratuitousness of that destiny. Everything is reckoned by the scale of the gospel, which the saint views as the revelation of the utter gratuitousness of love. As Van Roo put the matter in his definitive study *Grace and Original Justice According to St. Thomas*, 'As far as the essential need of grace is concerned, man needed it as much before original sin as after, since we speak of a need or exigency with respect

to an end. The end to which man is directed through grace, namely glory, is beyond human power before or after sin. In this respect, then, the need is not greater after sin than before' (1955: 63).<sup>9</sup>

Like later commentators, Aquinas seemed to conceive of human nature as that which is distinct from God, yet he insisted that, because of the sublimity of our destiny, we could never attain it without the explicit favor of God. Hence if one means by human nature a condition absolutely unfavored, untouched by God, for Aquinas, such a state never existed. It could not, because of a singular feature of our human nature, namely, its freedom.

Unlike the animals, who lack the freedom that would allow them to shed their nature, and who therefore perfectly fulfill the divine intention, the human person endowed with freedom is capable of responding, or failing to respond, to the initiative of God. Since the will could turn from God even in the state of original justice, the divine aid of grace was needed in order to maintain its fidelity to God. Unlike later commentators, Aquinas is not so concerned to distill what a possible human nature might be apart from grace. If nature means the human person before the advent of grace, such a distinction may be useful in theory to distinguish the gratuity of grace, but human nature never existed *ungraced*. Aquinas employs the nature/supernature dyad because he wants to affirm both the gratuity of God's initiative and our exigence for it. To appreciate the subtle balance he strikes between the two, contrast his work with that of a successor.

In 1551 the Flemish professor of theology at Louvain Michel de Bay (Michael Baius) would argue against the theorem of the supernatural, correctly noting that, as a medieval innovation, it is not found in Augustine. In fact, it was first introduced by Philip the Chancellor of the University of Paris, around 1230 (Stebbins 1995: 67–92). Yet to argue from silence in Augustine, who was operating under a different philosophical paradigm, to the rejection of the theorem in the changed circumstances of later epochs is invalid. Baius found himself denying the validity of the supernatural on the basis of a fundamentalist reading of Augustine. This led to his assertion that grace does not elevate the soul and cause the remission

<sup>9</sup> The 16th Council of Carthage (AD 418) had affirmed that grace not only remitted sin, but also preserved the Christian from it (DS 225; ND 1901).

of sins, that the latter comes about through fulfillment of the law, which, according to Baius, Adam could have done by virtue of his own created humanity and we can do now, under the influence of grace, which simply restores a humanity that Baius understood as *essentially* ordered toward God. In his superb treatment *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan*, J. Michael Stebbins explains, 'Baius explicitly denies the supernaturalness of grace because he mistakenly identifies human nature in the state of original righteousness with human nature in its integrity *qua* human. The created communication of the divine nature is gratuitous not because it exceeds the proportion of our nature, but only because in the state of fallen nature we can no longer claim it as our right' (1995: 62). For Baius, grace simply returns us to our prelapsarian state, and this state had no supernatural quality, since Baius insisted that God created humanity as ordered toward the divine in its own right. Grace, immortality, and freedom from concupiscence were not gratuitous but integral to human nature itself. In contrast, Aquinas had asserted that the first human possessed a human nature already elevated toward the supernatural, but this was because of a second, *contemporaneous* act of gratuity. In denying the theorem of the supernatural in changed philosophical circumstances, Baius found himself denying the gratuity of God's action in creation. His teaching would be condemned by three pontiffs: Pius V in 1567; Gregory XIII in 1579; and Urban VIII in 1641 (DS 1901–20; ND 1984/21 ff.).

The difficulty in defining human nature as that which stands apart from the initiative of God is that, when one reads the Genesis account through a gospel lens, it seems impossible not to see the act of creation itself as an event of grace. The gospel fundamentally reorients the understanding of creation's purpose.

The Genesis accounts stand well within the genre of the creation stories of other indigenous peoples. God, or the gods, are the ultimate source of the goodness which the world offers. Strictly speaking, the act of creation is typically not *ex nihilo*, but rather, as it is in this case, a fashioning of cosmos from chaos.<sup>10</sup> In either case, once the

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *De gen. ani.* 715b14. '[N]ature flies from the infinite; for the infinite is imperfect, and nature always seeks an end.'

world itself has been given to humanity as a dwelling place, the essential work of the deity, save the preservation of that benign world, is done.

Under the impetus of the resurrection, however, Christianity begins to view the natural world as prelude rather than prize. If this world is only a shadow of the ultimate goodness of God, the *sursum* or superabundance of which de Lubac spoke, if it is only the first step in a long drama leading to the consummation of human life in the divine, then one feels impelled, in a way unknown to indigenous religions, to define human life over against that toward which it is ordered.<sup>11</sup> When the divine stands within the cosmos, either exercising hegemonic authority, or as a pantheon of superior beings, there exists no need to divide the world over against the divine. In the cool of the evening, God walks in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3: 8), as much as Zeus enjoys the bounty of the world he shares with humanity. Greek temples are nestled into valleys or placed atop hills, so that earth literally frames the dwelling place of the gods. It is the dialogical character that Christianity introduces into the conceptual systems of the world religions, its supernatural *sursum*, that requires the creation of radical separation in the divine/human dyad. In Christianity, the Semitic triad of abyss, firmament, and earth gives way to the dyad of the New Jerusalem, a bride, and the Lamb, who is her light (Rev. 21: 1–8, 21–3; 2 Pet. 3). The purposefulness of creation is a question not posed by the sacred scriptures; Christianity only addresses it in contact with Platonic thought (Flick and Alszeghy 1982: 44). Plato's *Timaeus*, 30–1, explicitly asks why God creates, and answers that God does so because God is good and wants all things to share in the divine goodness. In other words, the good is inherently, and therefore necessarily, supereffusive. In the wake of the resurrection, however, Christianity's comprehension of the divine goodness, which it shares with Plato, is radically reconfigured. We do not represent a distant point of divine effulgence; on the contrary, we are called into the very

<sup>11</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the development within Judaism of an afterlife concept that is something more than the 'shadowlands of the dead', so typical of indigenous peoples. Also beyond the present discussion is the question of what debt the concept in contemporary Judaism owes to Christianity, or, conversely, what might be the Judaic roots of the distinctively Christian view of the afterlife.

life of the Godhead through a nuptial ordering. Creation is a free act, one ordered toward love.

Christianity rereads creation to be not only the blessing of this life, but a call to a *sursum*. Because they had not yet articulated the supernatural character of grace, early scholastics were hard pressed to differentiate grace from other divine gifts. One medieval, Adam Scotus, spoke of all God's gifts being graces (Stebbins 1995: 71). After all, God is never *not* gratuitous. Yet when Christians speak of grace they seek to evoke the specificity of what was *revealed* in the Christ event. Fidelity to the gospel demands a noetic component in the very definition of grace. One has to recognize what has been revealed. The very *experience* of grace is noetic.

One could say that in denying the theory of the supernatural, far from his intention, Baius obfuscated the Christological character of grace, because he read Genesis as bestowing everything in a single act, without the essentially Christian, subsequent *apperception* that what was given in creation was essentially ordered proleptically toward Christ.

No conceptual system steps free of time, which has a way of adulterating meaning simply because, unlike the stars, meaning is not something established in relationship to forever-fixed constellations. It shifts with the paradigms employed, which paradoxically means that an original, foundational insight often requires radical reformulation in the service of fidelity itself. Consider, for example, the fate of Thomas's synthesis in the age of science.

### 3.2.2 Nature and supernature

As in so many debates, each side in the twentieth century's nature/supernature dispute had grasped an essential characteristic of the Christian proclamation. One does need something like the concept of 'pure nature' to indicate our orientation toward God, in this case by theoretically outlining, not the converse of our life with God, since this is the very meaning of perdition, but rather what human nature might have looked like if God had only intended to establish us within the world as the apex of a creation that would forever remain essentially separated from divine life. Yet Christianity insists that this is not at all the destiny of humanity.



Here the Pauline paradox returns. How can grace be within human experience and yet represent a real opening to something more than the human? How that question is answered depends entirely upon the perspective from which it is posed, and in that regard Roger Haight identifies an important shift between Augustine and Aquinas. 'In Augustine, the concept or idea of "nature" is concrete, existential and historical. For him, human nature usually stands for what human beings are at any given period of history . . . To say that nature is historical, then, means that human nature changed with the historical Fall and is not now what it used to be' (1979: 56; cf. TeSelle 1970: 290). Consequently, for Augustine grace is primarily remedial, that which frees from sin.

With Aquinas, human nature, as a *nature*, must be characterized by Aristotelian stability. Once a *telos* has been assigned, any given nature is simply that stable aggregate of qualities which achieves that *telos*, or, as Haight puts it, '[N]ature is the principle that makes a thing what it is; it is the permanent ground that makes human beings human' (1979: 58). (In Aquinas see *In phys.* II lect. 2.) But then the historicity of the human person, particularly its salvific character, will require a new form of expression, one not needed in Augustine. Bernard Lonergan notes that the exigence for grace then undergoes a shift in translation between the two systems. 'In the early period the necessity of grace was in terms of the liberation of liberty; but the new analysis explains this necessity in terms of human finality' (2000: 19). If the human person is understood as destined for communion with God, then this destiny must somehow be translated into the stable terms of nature.

Using the Greek concept of nature as that which is essentially static and closed, and then simply funneling the same paradigm into a human scale, one seems impelled to speak of grace as *supernatural*. How else does one express both its gratuity and its divinity? As Haight explains,

[A]quinas is very Greek in presupposing an immutable and immutably consistent Creator-God. On these suppositions, to affirm that human existence is oriented by its very nature toward a personal and spiritual possession of God as its proper object would imply either necessary universal salvation (which seems to offend God's justice) or an inconsistency in the Creator (if some persons do not reach this end). For this reason, the call to union with

God is conceived of as utterly supernatural and therefore offered to persons with complete freedom by God. (1979: 64)

If one begins with the Greek spatio-physical picture of the world, God must stand outside of it. Therefore God must stand *above* nature. Variant locative prepositions hardly seem appropriate. Perhaps God could stand underneath (*sub*) nature as its foundation, but God certainly couldn't stand beside (*prope*) nature, or worse, within it! One problem in using the philosophical concept of 'human nature' for theological discourse is the unrecognized analogical transfer of the properties of cosmic nature to that of the human person. Cosmic nature is essentially closed, structured, and static. When transferred to the human person, does such a paradigm do justice to the proclamation of a gospel that must be seen as an address to human freedom? Nature cannot undergo conversion. If the scriptures speak of a cosmos transformed, this is only because of the circumincessive character of spirit and matter.

If nature, cosmic or human, is an *essentially* closed system, it doesn't truly require God. It is self-sufficient and self-perpetuating. Aristotle can't place God *within* nature, in the manner of an efficient cause. That would make God only one more element *of* nature, hardly a worthy ontological spot for the deity! Aristotle's God has only one act of efficient causality vis-à-vis the world. He moves nature, but not the world, into existence (nature being understood as purposeful movement within the world). All subsequent movement within the world is ultimately due to the movement of the celestial spheres, which, having been set in motion by God, move, internally and eternally, as the celestial fulcrums of nature. Indeed, Aristotle's Prime Mover can only move once, otherwise one introduces change, or motion, within the deity itself.

Strictly speaking, when the revealed religions proclaim God as the creator of nature, they are no longer speaking of what the Greeks would have recognized as nature. Here it is very significant to note that the religions of revelation call God the creator of the world, not nature. Elide the distinction, and God must not only create, but also sustain and govern this new 'nature'. Revelation does maintain that God creates, sustains, and governs the world, but that is a fundamentally different assertion.

In his succinct classic *The End of the Modern World*, Romano Guardini characterizes the worldview of the ancients as *essentially* closed. Like the light surrounding a fire on a dark plain, it simply exhausts itself at its fringes.

Classical man never went beyond his world; his feeling for life, his imagination and his vision of existence were one with the limited world he knew. He never asked himself whether or not something might exist beyond his known world. His attitude was born of an unintentional humility, shy of crossing well-marked boundaries, and of a will which was rooted deeply in the classical ethos and kept him within the limits of accepted things. Primarily, classical man felt as he did because he lacked any relation which could transcend his world; such a relation would have been indispensable before he could have experienced any desire to see beyond his universe. To the man of the ancient world, however, the universe itself was the whole of reality. What could classical man have used then as his springboard into transcendence? One might answer: the experience of a Divine Being Who transcended the whole of the limited cosmos, Whose existence and very reality would alter the world outlook of anyone who believes in Him. But classical man never knew such a Being. (1998: 1–2)

Today the problem with God governing nature is simply the superfluity of the hypothesis. Contemporary thought has arrived at the same place from which the ancient Greek departed. A deity isn't needed to explain the workings of nature. Human thought seems quite content to rest in the idea of an orderly, patterned universe governed by nature, a nature identified with a set of theories affirmed by empirical investigation. It's certainly appropriate to ask what unity a set of theories offers, but the question of unity itself raises a uniquely human need. It calls into question the sufficiency of a purely empirical view of the world. How does a human subject who experiences the self as freely engaging the world come to see the self as sufficiently explained in a worldview reduced to a natural system of self-contained laws?

The great challenge that confronted twentieth-century Catholic theology was to locate grace in a cosmos that no longer required the supernatural in its understanding of causality. The search for the 'place' of grace in the conceptual world was not unlike the quandary of early twentieth-century philosophy about where logic 'fit' into the world. In both cases, when one pictures the real as a collection of objects, one can hardly avoid the dilemma.

It was the French Jesuit theologian, and later cardinal, Henri de Lubac who insisted with persuasive force in *Surnaturel* (1946) and again in *Le Mystère du surnaturel* (1965) that something had become jejune in Christianity's speaking of two realms, the natural and the supernatural. Was there really such a thing as a natural human order, one which had no relationship to the divine until addressed by it? Has such an order ever existed? And yet don't we have to posit a *pure* human nature in order to maintain the transcendence of the divine? The supernatural must somehow descend upon the natural, which must be distinct from it. After all, if the divine is necessarily co-involved with the human, if it is something that human nature might demand for its own completion, in what sense is it something *more than* the human? As Aquinas put it, 'There is an end for which man is prepared by God which surpasses the *proportion of human nature*, that is, eternal life, which consists in the vision of God by His essence' (*De ver.* q. 27 a. 2). The phrase 'exceeding the proportion of human nature (*naturae humanae proportionem excedens*)' does not necessarily evoke static, parallel realms, though to the mind of de Lubac it was just such a picture that impinged itself upon the interpreters of Aquinas.

De Lubac insisted that the Pauline paradox did not require the creation of layered realms and, further, that the earliest strands of Christian discourse did not speak of two realms. Wittgenstein is particularly helpful here. Language, because it operates in the eddies of language games, often impels us to say certain things, leaving us with an inadequate picture unless these games are balanced by other such games. Grace can be gratuitous, an offer to humanity that transcends humanity without being an *object* imported into our realm from that of another. It's the wrong linguistic picture that suggests that *objects* are most real. De Lubac struggled to free theology from a dual-tiered image of God's relationship to the world, going so far as to suggest that the two tiers, which were designed to safeguard the gratuity of grace, had led in the modern world to the utter gratuitousness, the superfluity, of grace. In other words, modern scientific thought will inevitably slide back into the Greek conception of a world complete within itself, one that does not need to seek the boon that communion with one who is radically other offers. He is worth quoting at some length:

The consequences of making this kind of division and providing this kind of option are quick to follow. Henceforward all the values of the supernatural order, all those which characterize the present relationship between man and God in our economy of grace, will be gradually reabsorbed into that 'purely natural' order that has been imagined (and I say 'imagined' advisedly). In that order as in the other we will find faith, prayer, the perfect virtues, the remission of sins by infused charity, grace, divine friendship, spiritual union with God, disinterested love, and a docile abandonment to 'personal Love.' In short, nothing is lacking. Nothing—for there is even a revelation which, while supernatural in origin and mode, has none the less, owing to its object, always been 'entitatively natural.' One may say, indeed, that the substitution is complete—but I prefer myself to say that the disguise is complete. Everything that now comes to us by the grace of God is thus withdrawn from the 'supernatural' properly so called of our present economy, and 'naturalized'—at the risk of being attributed afresh to some special intervention by God according to a different 'mode.' No difficulty is found in speaking of 'natural graces,' 'natural contrition,' of friendship with God 'to the exclusion of grace' [*seclusa gratia*] or 'purely naturally' [*in puris naturalibus*]; there seems no obstacle in conceiving of a disinterested love of God, a love that is 'most excellent' [*excellentissimus*] and 'above all things' [*super omnia*], directed towards 'the author of nature' and existing as a fruit of 'pure nature'. (de Lubac 1967: 39–40)<sup>12</sup>

De Lubac correctly noted that the two tiers produced a Christian picture that no longer spoke to the modern world, at least not in a manner that seemed to suggest that Christianity had anything to offer the world. Remember that a 'world' is a picture. It is the collective, heuristic structure out of which human thought operates. Thought never exists apart from worlds of discourse, for the simple reason that discourse necessarily creates mutually affirmed worlds. De Lubac trenchantly noted that the Christian proclamation is dependent, whether it avers to this or not, upon the heuristic world in which it is preached. Operate in a world that finds grace meaningless, and there is little to proclaim. Interlocutors must first share a world in order for proclamation to occur. De Lubac pleaded,

<sup>12</sup> Burrell offers a succinct philosophical variant on the necessity of God conceived in distinction *from* the world (1986: 17). 'For if the distinction of God from the world is treated as one in the world, then either God will be exalted at the expense of God's world, or God will be seen as part of a necessary whole—since in each case the attempt is to understand the entirety: God-plus-world.'

‘Without dogmatically denying that there may be other possibilities, without rejecting any abstract hypothesis which might be a good way of making certain truths more vivid to us, it is surely “more simple and reasonable,” when working out a theological doctrine, not to try to get away from reality as we know it’ (1967: 49–50).

Has anyone ever been converted by a street preacher in Times Square? If the numbers of such converts are very, very small, it is simply because the preacher and the audience, while occupying the same street corner, do not share the same world. If the world of the person passing by is in order as it stands, how does one demand conversion of him or her as necessary in order to open the self to a world yet to come?

De Lubac also addressed a parallel perplexity: the tendency in Christian theology to picture grace as an object, though a sublime one. Such discourse ‘supposes the imperfect analogy of a human gift, as though God, though infinitely better and more powerful, stood in the same relation to me as another man; as though his situation were completely exterior to me, so that he could only give me a present, a completely exterior gift’ (1967: 78).

The problem with this image is that it only very crudely expresses the transcendence of God. Recall the *Tractarian* picture of the world, which on this point corresponds to the Aristotelian. God cannot be an element of the world. Yet in the picture de Lubac criticizes, grace appears as an inner-worldly reality. Granted that the world depicted is multi-spheric, grace still appears as the transference of an entity from one hierarchical sphere into a second, with both spheres, the natural and the supernatural, lying *within* the world.

Contrast the medieval worldview with the modern, of which Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* is a particularly apt expression. The *Tractatus* was intended to serve as a flawless picture of the modern heuristic world. As such it had twin presuppositions, the first of which opens the *Tractatus*: ‘The world is all that is the case’ (Wittgenstein 1961: 5; §1). This is the ‘picture’ that will be painted by science. The second presupposition closes the work: ‘God does not reveal himself *in* the world’ (1961: 73; §6.432).

De Lubac insisted that the Christian tradition needed to reexamine its own sources in order to speak of grace in a manner that was, paradoxically, both more faithful to the tradition and more engaged with the modern worldview. The image of grace as a gift

lacks that element of inwardness—which we also call transcendence—which belongs to the creating God who ‘is more interior to me than I am myself,’ ‘*Deus interior intimo meo.*’ This fundamental criticism of the analogy does not, as I must again stress, mean any doubt or even cheapening of the value of the idea of gift—or the idea of witness. Quite the reverse. The witness of God is incomparably higher than any human witness, and similarly his gift. This does not mean simply that his witness is stronger, more incontestable, or that his gift is freer or more magnificent. Though it is not wrong to say this, it is inadequate; it leaves us still within the human order. The human analogy would not yet be really faulted. It means that his witness is more really a witness, his gift more really a gift, in a higher sense. The formal idea of gift, like that of witness, is verified in God in his relationship to us in a higher way—especially if one recalls that God’s gift is God himself—than is accessible to our experience in human relations. Hence the unique certainty of faith, the unique gratuitousness of the supernatural. (1967: 78–9)

De Lubac’s inquietude about the picture used to proclaim the graciousness of God inaugurated a lively debate concerning the validity of the natural/supernatural distinction, especially the notion of a *natura pura*. Yet what had become problematic for the ‘pure nature’ hypothesis was the paradigm shift of the modern world. For the scholastic theologians, the state of pure nature was intended to depict the superabundance of God’s gift. Sadly, the same concept today suggests superfluity.

In his 1961 essay ‘Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace,’ Karl Rahner agreed that ‘an extrinsicism of this kind has been current in the average teaching on grace in the last few centuries’ (*TI* i. 298). He noted that

This average view is in fact open to serious objection. There is no difficulty in seeing that it is problematic and dangerous from a religious point of view: if man, just so far as he experiences himself existentially by himself, is really nothing but pure nature, he is always in danger of understanding himself merely as a nature and of behaving accordingly. And then he will find God’s call to him out of this human plane merely a disturbance, which is trying to force something upon him (however elevated this may be in itself) for which he is not made (on this view he is only made and destined for it *after* he has received grace, and then only in a way entirely abstracted from experience). (*TI* i. 300)

Rahner attempted to sidestep the nature/supernatural debate by offering a new, Heidegger-inspired term, the ‘supernatural existential’.

It meant simply that human beings have always lived within a graced world. In view of the Incarnation, they have always been ordered toward Christ (cf. *ST* IIIa pr.). Rahner suggested that the idea of human life standing apart from God, what might be called 'pure' human nature, was really only a 'remainder concept' (*Restbegriff*). It was an abstraction, being only a conceptual consideration of what would remain of human nature if God had not chosen to give himself to it. In order to distinguish between the divine and the human, one must sometimes speak of nature apart from grace, all the while recognizing that this has not actually occurred in human history. A 'graceless humanity' is only something that might have been possible. The world in which we live has always been graced because of a decision God made in human history.

At the same time, Rahner clearly noted that the above solution rested upon an inadequate metaphysics. He lamented that traditional scholastic ontology seemed inadequate to the task of proclaiming the radically transforming offer of grace in Christ, and he adumbrated a future approach:

All the questions and theses concerning the relationship of nature and grace would need to be wholly rethought in terms of an explicit recognition of the fact that grace is not just a 'neutral state' (however sublime), that it cannot be sufficiently described by purely formal ontological categories alone (created 'quality,' accident, *habitus*, etc.), but that personal categories (love, personal intimacy, self-communication) can neither be avoided in the description of what grace is, nor, because they do not belong to the realm of formal ontology, are on that account inaccessible to a more precise philosophical or theological reflection or stand in no need of it. (*TI* i. 316)

Rahner was not alone in realizing that traditional ontology didn't fully serve the biblical, or the modern, worldview. About the same time, Juan Alfaro warned that speaking of grace 'exclusively in categories applicable equally well to a non-personal communication is obviously insufficient. It overlooks the most characteristic aspect, the personal self-giving. If one forces the mystery of the divine indwelling into the schema of act and actuation, one takes away the most authentic element of the mystery—namely, the personal communication' (1966: 181).



Having reviewed the critique of the nature/supernature dyad, which Aquinas so brilliantly employed, but which suffered its own eclipse with the movement of celestial spheres, the second task in this Thomistic retrieval is a reexamination of Thomas's use of Greek metaphysics, in particular his use of the term 'substance'.

### 3.2.3 Thomas on substance, subjects, and relatedness

As any Thomist knows, Aquinas considered grace to be not a substance, but rather an accident, that which modifies a substance. Thomas's Aristotelianism would not allow grace to be understood as a substance because, if one is to maintain fidelity to the Christian tradition, grace must be a relation, and relations are always between substances.<sup>13</sup> In Aristotelian ontology, Thomas seems to give grace a status lower than that of substance, which helps to explain the 'upward ontological drift' in the popular recapitulation of the saint's philosophy. Believers who are not Aristotelian philosophers tend to speak of grace as a substance simply to acknowledge that grace is 'substantial', here meaning something crucial to the Christian worldview. The problem is that when one uses the word 'substance' in a culture dominated by empiricism one quickly slides into the picture of grace as object, in this case a necessarily non-empirical, occult object. Such language is incomprehensible to the non-believer, and it wouldn't have made sense to Aquinas either. The saint may have employed a philosophical system that, used alone and without development, is no longer capable of adequately expressing the gospel, simply because the world, which is always linguistic, has evolved, but, in his own time, he did not employ a system that ignored the deeply personal, which is to say noetic and relational, character of grace. Substance in Greek thought bears a particular task that requires examination. It designates that which perdures as an integral unity, and in doing so it creates the very possibility of relationship.

W. Norris Clarke is surely correct when he notes that several centuries have overlaid and obscured Thomas's rich use of the

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Cate.* 6a37. 'We call *relatives* all such things as are said to be just what they are, *of* or *than* other things, or in some way *in relation to* something else.' Likewise Aquinas in *De ver.* q. 1 a. 5 ad 16.

term. For Descartes, substance is 'that which can exist by itself without the aid of any other substance' (1911: 101). Of course, only God meets this definition of substance, which is why Descartes later redefined the term to mean that which needs nothing, save God, to exist. In the empirical tradition, Locke thought of the substance 'as the inert, unknowable, substratum of accidents, which are alone known to us. These accidental properties need substance as an ontological support, but seem too much like pins stuck in a pincushion, which is itself inert, static, without dynamic self-communicative relationship with them and through them to the outside world' (Clarke 1994: 111). Note that substance thus conceived suffers from a dual alienation. It does not dynamically interact with its own properties, and it remains essentially unknowable to us. We only know it by encountering those properties.

For David Hume 'the idea of a substance... is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned to them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection' (1967: 16; 1.1.6.2). Clarke notes that Hume rejected the notion of an abiding, self-identical substance 'as an invention of the metaphysicians with no grounding in reality'. As Hume saw it, we simply create substances to account causally for the sequence of sensations that we experience. 'It is clear from his arguments and those of his empiricist followers, like Bertrand Russell, that substance is something which, if it existed, would have been found *separate* (or separable) from its accidental properties, existing in a kind of naked, indeterminate state' (Clarke 1994: 112).

With the arrival of Whitehead, who sought a new metaphysics in the wake of empiricism, substance itself had to be banished from the world of nature, which is then viewed as a series of actual occasions, a flux of discrete moments. One has Hume without the empiricism. What one lacks is a principle of identity, something that endures, and without it one can scarcely build a metaphysical edifice that is personal.

Yet Clarke insists that the centuries have obscured Thomas's much more dynamic and relational conception of substance as 'an integrating center of a being's activities, a center which is constantly pouring over into self-expression through its characteristic actions

and at the same time constantly integrating or actively assimilating all that it receives from the action of other substances on it' (1994: 16–17). Hence to be a substance is always to be a substance-in-relation. A substance can never be a monad, either vis-à-vis the substance's properties, its accidents, or from other substances. If one is to account for the dynamism that Thomas saw in the human spirit, which according to Metz is the impetus to the dynamism of his cosmology, to be a subject is to act, specifically, to interact with other substances. Indeed, Thomas's personalism is so predominant that it would not be incorrect to say that he sees the entire cosmos not as a continuum of substances but rather as a communion of subjects, which is to say dialogical partners.

Remember that for Thomas *agere sequitur esse* (to act follows upon to be). Activity is not an addendum to the act of being; it is its essential self-expression, its effulgence. To be is to act.<sup>14</sup> Clarke asserts of Thomas's teaching: 'Every being . . . insofar as it *is* in act, tends naturally to overflow into action, and this action is a *self-communication*, a self-giving in some way' (1994: 47).<sup>15</sup>

Thomas will maintain the Aristotelian primacy of substances over relations, because only substances can be subjects capable of entering into relationships with each other. Stress too strongly the independence of the substance, and one arrives at a monadism that cannot explicate the dynamism that we experience in the world. Stress relationship too strongly, and one cannot account for that which endures. And if nothing endures, nothing can enter into relationship. One cannot give the self over into a relationship if there is no self. As Wittgenstein put it, 'What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that "the world is my world"' (1961: 58; §5.641).

<sup>14</sup> 'Every agent acts according as it is in actuality' (*De pot.* I. 2 art. 1); 'From the very fact that something exists in act, it is active' (*Sum. c. gen.* I. 43); 'Active power follows upon being in act; for anything acts in consequence of its being in act' (*ibid.*, II. 7). Rahner retrieves the same in his foundational *Spirit in the World* by writing trenchantly, 'The essence of man is not completely itself until he acts' (1968: 15).

<sup>15</sup> For Thomas the world is a communion of interlocutors. Those familiar with Rahner's metaphysics of epistemology know that he uses this Thomistic teaching in his seminal essay 'The Theology of the Symbol' to explain the essentially symbolic nature of all being. 'Our first statement, which we put forward as the basic principle of an ontology of symbolism, is as follows: all beings are by their very nature symbolic, because they necessarily "express" themselves in order to attain their own nature' (*TI* iv. 224).

Clarke defends the Thomistic reliance upon Aristotelian substance by showing the alternative. In personalist language, the eclipse of the substance means the banishment of the subject.

The primary instance of real being is the individual existent as a 'nature,' i.e., as an abiding center (no matter for how long) of its own characteristic actions and the ultimate subject of which attributes are predicated, but which itself is predicated of no other subject as an attribute or part. This ability to exist *in itself* as an ultimate subject of action and attribution and not as part of any other being is what it means to be called a *substance* (from the Latin *sub-stans*: that which 'stands under' all its attributes as their ultimate subject). To stand thus 'in itself' does not mean that the entity thus characterized is not *related* to others. As we shall see, the intrinsic orientation toward self-expressive action that is also characteristic of all natures—hence of all substances—implies that all substances will be related at least to some others. But it does mean that no substance, no real being in an unqualified sense, can be nothing but a pure *relation*. A relation in the real order must relate something, making it a related, or the relation itself self-destructs. As the Buddhists have long insightfully argued, if all beings are nothing but relations, such that A is nothing but a relation to B, and B is nothing but a relation to A, then neither one has 'own being' and both disappear into 'emptiness' (*sunyata*)—a point often naively overlooked, it seems to me, by many modern Western philosophers who cavalierly dismiss substance for relation as the primary mode of being. (1994: 104–5)

Despite Clarke's brilliant retrieval of the concept of substance for a personalist philosophy of being, a contemporary Christian might still be disappointed to hear that St Thomas considers grace to be an accidental modification of the substance that is the human person. 'Accidental' can seem to suggest both lack of necessity and ephemerality. It's important to note, however, that in Aristotelian categories a modification stronger than accidental would mark a change of substance. In this system, if God and the human person are not to be collapsed into each other, they must remain distinct substances. God's action cannot subsume the human subject or so fundamentally alter it as to obliterate it, in the sense that it would no longer be the same substance, the same subject as an enduring unity of action. The challenge Thomas faced was to use Aristotle in a way that indicated the profound relationship that grace establishes without obliterating one or the other related subjects.

Again, one must caution about the picture being employed. For Thomas the substance which is the human person cannot be conceived apart from its accidents. It simply *is* its own accidents, as their temporal and spatial source of unity. Only God can be conceived of as a substance that never undergoes modification. Fully cognizant of temporality, Thomas views created substances as being always subject to modification. Without it, they cannot actualize their own potency, which for Thomas means to become what they were meant to be.

Thomas will speak of grace as a form that modifies accidents by gathering them into itself. In Thomistic thought a form is the unitive principle allowing the many of sensory experience to be considered under a single intellectual aspect, as a one.<sup>16</sup> Every time the human person, through the use of the intellect, perceives a unity amidst a plurality of instances, a form has been recognized. Both accidents and substances are ultimately characterized by forms. A given flower, or the sun, or a piece of cloth may all be *instances* of yellow; yellow then becomes the form that transcends these individual instances. That which can hold together a host of such accidental forms and endures is a substance.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas will thus call the soul the form of the body because we perceive the body, the self which acts within the world, to be a self, a cohesive, abiding center of activity. How different this is from the contemporary picture of the soul as that which steps away from the body, say at death, to reveal its own existence. For Thomas, nothing reveals the soul so much as the activity of the corporeal self that acts within the world.

<sup>16</sup> See Rahner 1968: 136–42 on the human intellect's ability to abstract that form which is itself the material unity of the sensory. Faithful to Thomas, the form is abstracted, not mentally imposed. Lonergan traces the human 'imposition' of form back to the Aristotelian need to bring being before the mind as conceptual content. '[B]eing can be defined by us only indirectly, and so Aristotle was unable to assign any specific act of understanding that resulted in the conceptual content of being. However, the conspicuous type of acts of understanding is the insight that grasps intelligible form emergent in sensible data; and so Aristotle assigned the ontological principle, form, as the ground of being in things and the cognitional act of grasping form as the insight from which originates the conceptual content, being' (1958: 367). Cf. Burrell 1979: 16.

<sup>17</sup> See *ST I* q. 5 a. 1 ad 1; q. 39 a 3 corp.: 'accidentia . . . esse habent in subjecto.' In *Sent. lib. meta.* VII. 4. 22 'accidentia vero non habent esse nisi per hoc insunt subjecto.'

Why are we now so far removed from the dynamism in Thomas's original employment of the word 'form'? Lonergan suggests in *Insight* that the picture holding us captive is an unfortunate inversion. We tend to view concepts not as the productive result of the dynamic activity of human knowledge, but rather as guaranteed by that which stands beyond knowledge. He insists that potency, form, and act must be defined, not solely by their relations to one another, but also by their relations to human knowing. He writes:

- (1) if a man is in the intellectual pattern of experience, and
- (2) if he is knowing an object within the domain of proportionate being, then his knowing will consist in experiencing, understanding, and judging, and the known will be a compound of potency, form, and act, where potency, form, and act are related as the experienced, the understood, and the affirmed, and where they possess no meaning other than what has to be presupposed if there is inquiry, what is known inasmuch as there is understanding, and what is known inasmuch as judgment results from a grasp of the virtually unconditioned. (1958: 735)

So while grace in the Thomistic system, representing a modification of accidents, may seem to make grace somewhat less than essential, Thomas correctly locates grace within the Aristotelian system of substances and accidents. Grace cannot be a substance, an enduring field of activity, simply because in the Thomistic cosmos every substance is drawn into a dialogical union with every other substance. In this sense, one should say that, for Thomas, all of creation is transferred from the status of substance to subject. Grace is the place of union, not a dialogical partner of union. It is the unique relationship between God and humanity. To speak of grace as a substance wreaks havoc with the subtle language game being employed by Aquinas. Substances always stand in relationship; they cannot be relations. Again, the similarity to Wittgenstein's struggle to free philosophy from an inadequate picture of logic is helpful. If logic stood within the world, as one more object, it could not be that which unifies the world, which makes distinct objects into a world. If grace were one more object within the world, it could not be that which draws the world together and into union with the divine.

### 3.2.4 Causality as language game

One can again see the balance of the Thomistic synthesis when it is contrasted with subsequent efforts. Luther had little use for Thomas's Aristotelianism, seeing it as a Greek occlusion of gospel clarity, and the subjective turn that he introduced into theology suffers as a consequence. The Wittenberg professor's great theological contribution, particularly focused on the question of grace, was his turn from scholastic theorems to direct experience as the primary focus of theological discourse. His Tower Experience had left him convinced not only of the reality of grace, but also that its presence could be distinctly discerned and delineated from other human experiences.

Some encounters with the supernatural seem to carry their own validation, at least for the person who experiences them. The difficulty arises when those outside of the experience are asked to reassess their own understanding of the divine on the basis of another's testimony. It's precisely here that philosophical insights prove their worth in the service of faith, because they help to translate true experiences into a common meter, while they diminish discordant ones by way of critical analysis and systematization.<sup>18</sup> Unless there is absolutely no coherence of truth, even the most particular of truths, one which a personal experience of grace would undoubtedly represent, can still be made to dialogue with the discernment of others.

Wittgenstein insists that there is no such thing as a private language, one whose symbols correspond solely to events and objects known only to the speaker. Why? Because even those experiences come to the speaker by way of the collective inheritance that is language. There is nothing to preclude my having an experience tomorrow unlike any other experience ever granted a human being, yet that experience will be clothed in the language I already wield. It will find expression using words and symbols fashioned by others, and this is true not only when I choose to speak of it to others but also in my own interior, most private, appropriation of it.

<sup>18</sup> Victor Preller cites *ST I* q. 88 a. 3 in discussing Aquinas's reluctance to draw upon mystical experiences as potential sources of theological data because they were *in principle* not communicable to others (1967: 192–4).

Whether or not, and to what extent, grace could be experienced became a pivotal issue in the Reformation debate on justification. One of the difficulties Luther found in the scholastic notion of created grace as an entitive modification of the human person is that it seemed to suggest that any person, once so modified, would be the *necessary* recipient of justification, a notion that seemed to assault the freedom of God's action. Use a material image of grace, as either substance or a modification of a material substance, and it's difficult not to see the cogency of Luther's rejection of created grace (cf. Ladaria 1983: 294). It seems to suggest that our confidence should be founded not upon the event of grace that is Christ, but rather upon some entitive modification of human nature.

Trent's response to the Lutheran critique was nuanced. First, it declined to define created grace, grace within the human person, reasonably enough since the schools themselves had failed to come to a consensus on the point.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Trent did affirm that the effect of grace upon the human person had to be something inherent, and not merely an extrinsic, forensic imputation of justification.<sup>20</sup> It did respond to the Lutheran concern by insisting that grace, even created grace, can never be conceived apart from its relationship to Christ. Yet, as Ernst notes, in responding to Luther, Trent failed to enter the new ground in theology that his turn to personal experience had opened. Trent 'may not unfairly be regarded as a strong re-affirmation of the classical tradition of Christian theology in the West, without any real understanding of the deep shift of theological consciousness which had taken place' (Ernst 1974: 56).

Luther was convinced that grace, because it is contact with the divine, subjugates all other human experiences. How can the intrusion of God into the world not demand absolute adherence? What

<sup>19</sup> Pesch notes that the Council did not dogmatize the notion of grace as a quality of the human person, leaving open the question of its metaphysical character (1983: 274).

<sup>20</sup> (DS 1529; ND 1932); (DS 1561; ND 1961). Pesch correctly notes that responding to Luther had the effect of limiting the Tridentine discussion, focusing it upon justification rather than the much more ample tradition of grace *per se*. As he puts it, 'The traditional expressions of the teachings on grace were subsumed by those of justification, not vice-a-versa' (1983: 208).



human reality could stand over and against the living God?<sup>21</sup> Wouldn't that be the very definition of sin, of damnation? Thus in his epochal *The Bondage of the Will* (*De servo arbitrio*) of 1525, Luther insisted, despite our apparent certitude of experience to the contrary, that there is no such thing as human freedom, because a free humanity would impinge upon the sovereignty of God. The 'omnipotence and the foreknowledge of God, I say, completely abolish the dogma of free choice' (Luther 1972: 189).

The assertion is at least logically rigorous, given the unacknowledged Aristotelianism. A substance interacting with another substance modifies it either accidentally or substantially. God and humanity can't truly interact in a way that would be dependent upon human freedom, because that would entail God's substance undergoing change in response to humanity.<sup>22</sup> Hence human freedom is an illusion, and God never alters in response to it. So Luther could write, 'Here, then, is something fundamentally necessary and salutary for a Christian, to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that he foresees and purposes and does all things by his immutable, eternal, and infallible will . . . From this it follows irrefutably that everything we do, everything that happens, even if it seems to us to happen mutably and contingently, happens in fact nonetheless necessarily and immutably' (1972: 37–8). Luther saw himself as the champion of grace, but when the wrong picture of grace is employed—here in an unattenuated Greek model—the relationship that grace connotes seems to demand the suppression of one or the other interacting subjects. Luther sought to banish Greek metaphysics from the gospel, but retaining an unacknowledged concept of substance, as that which stands monad-like apart from other

<sup>21</sup> Ernst 1974: 58: 'It is now widely recognized that Luther cannot be properly understood except against the background of late scholastic theology, especially the nominalist tradition beginning with William of Ockham. If we try to enter sympathetically into the theological concerns of this period of theology in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we may see it as a resolute attempt to insist upon the transcendence of God, perhaps as a counterbalance to a Christendom increasingly involved in power politics and superstition.' The classical treatment of the question of nominalism and Luther is still H. Oberman. *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963). Cf. Pelikan 1984: 25.

<sup>22</sup> Pesch notes that Luther read Erasmus as positing human freedom over and against divine freedom, a polarity he had no choice but to reject (1983: 273).

substances, he was forced to banish the reality of one of the two substances that interact. The human person must yield to the divine. Thus 'man is simply passive (as they say) and does nothing, but becomes something without qualification' (1972: 157). History itself, as the drama of freedom, is banished before the seemingly obvious demands of God's immutable transcendence. Slipping into the back pew, Aristotle has subverted the sermon.

Grace begins its life as an act of historical perception, not only in the scriptures but in Luther's personal history. Yet when translated poorly into the Greek concepts of nature, substance, and relationship, it ends in a philosophical denial of that very history. '[W]hen a man has no doubt that everything depends on the will of God, then he completely despairs of himself and chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work; then he has come close to grace, and can be saved' (Luther 1972: 62). In his desire to champion the reality and the power of grace, Luther ironically drains away from it the very medium of its life, history.

Thomas did not make the same mistake. In great measure he retains the Aristotelian system, but with essential, creation-inspired modifications. On one level of discourse he will insist, like Luther after him, that God efficiently moves the entire world.<sup>23</sup> But unlike Luther, he employs more than one level of discourse, and without confusion. When the doctrine of creation is translated into Greek metaphysics, the very fact that God alone represents the perfection of form, and alone bestows existence upon all other existents, requires that one speak of God as the efficient cause of all creation. When one asserts that existence is not simply a given but a movement, an act of another whose existence is not contingent, one has introduced efficient causality in a measure that foundationally alters all subsequent discourse.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas unambiguously taught that God efficiently moves every operation of nature and will. Cf. *De pot.* q. 3 a. 7; *Sum. c. gen.* III. 67; *ST I* q. 105 a. 5; *Sent.* II d. I q. 1 a. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Preller writes aptly (1967: 123): 'For Aquinas, however, the most profound instance of "motion" is the "motion" of something from *complete* potentiality in all respects—from *nothing*—to first actuality or existence... Whatever Aquinas' first mover is doing (whatever "power" or "agency" he is communicating to objects in the world) it has nothing to do with motion as it "is certain and evident to senses." Aquinas is reading Aristotle's argument, but he is hearing or intending the Doctrine of Creation.' Cf. Burrell 1986: 95.

Wittgenstein insists that words take their meaning from their context of employment. They don't have a meaning that stands clear of usage. Consider the word 'freedom'. Behind Luther's fundamentalism is a brutish philosophical conceptualism. He thinks freedom has a univocal meaning, and that an occult object guarantees its essence. But freedom is radically copulative. Its employment demands contextualization.

I may say that I am free and mean by that assertion that I enjoy substantially greater civil liberties than those in other cultures. Hence I am free. Yet a psychologist, convinced of the powerful role that unacknowledged psychic drives and conditionings play in human life, could also correctly assert that I am not free. This is not an either/or alternative. I am both free and unfree, depending, one might say, upon the direction of the gaze. Failure to recognize the language game at play is not unlike the person who thinks he can explain his origins by always answering, 'I'm from home.'

The meaning of the word freedom depends upon context. A believer must assert that, on one level, God is the efficient cause of all that is not God, because she views the world itself as contingent. Yet it's a muddled picture of causality, one constructed using elements of physical motion, which asserts that, if God fixes the perimeters of the world, God must necessarily control all activity within the world. Distinctive language games have been stirred into mush.

It's a paradoxical language game, one drawn from the paradox that is faith, but a believer wants to insist, not, *pace* Luther, that there is no contingency, but that the radical contingency which we experience within the world is not *ultimately* contingent because the world itself is contingent. Our world is history, which is to say that it is the gift of freedom. While the freedom we experience grounds our understanding of *formal* divine causality, the existence of the world *as free* is attributed to *efficient* divine causality. Our experience of freedom itself is seen to be a grace. To express it in Thomas's terms, all potentiality and hence all contingency is rooted in the self-sustaining act that is God. This is what Luther wanted to assert, but the assertion itself has no sense if one obliterates the contingency within the world. In establishing the transcendence of God's act, Luther drains the world itself of potency.

Something similar occurs in scientific discourse. Unlike deductive and essentialist Aristotelian science, modern science presumes upon the radical contingency of the world and seeks to explain this contingency by an elaborated system of theories. A correct scientific theorem explains why a given event occurs, and so one might, if one speaks carelessly, say that the law of gravity causes an object on earth to fall to the ground. But the law doesn't *cause* the event; it *explains* it. In like manner, nature doesn't induce anything to occur. Nature is our word for the collective system of insights that explain *why* things occur.

'Induce' operates in the field of efficient causality; 'why' in that of the formal. Within the *system* that is nature, one constantly seeks efficient causes, but *as a system* nature represents formal causality, because it is the ever-evolving mosaic assembled with the tesserae of the most basic activity of human intelligence, the power of language itself, to impose form. A rule of nature is not a member of the world, not even an occult one, operating efficiently within the world. The result of neither mere convention nor brute reality, a rule of nature is rather our unique human appropriation of the world. P. M. S. Hacker, one of Wittgenstein's most definitive commentators, is helpful here (1996: 119): 'Grammar is not reflecting the nature of things, but determining it—by laying down what is *to count* as such-and-such a thing. Essences are reflections of forms of representations, marks of concepts, made and not found, stipulated and not discovered.' Of course our appropriation of the world seems perfectly 'to fit' the world. It's our appropriation! But language obfuscates when that linguistic appropriation is conceived of as an occult agent.

Aquinas allows each of the various language games of causality to occupy its own realm of discourse. Following Aristotle, God controls activity *within the world* primarily through formal causality (cf. Aristotle's *Meta.* XII. 7. 1072a26–7 and XII. 7. 1072b3–4). As the fullness of Being, God represents the highest good and constitutes the human intellect and will so that the latter pursues that good which the former has illumined, ever striving for the summit of being, truth, and goodness that is God. Clumsily stomp on this form of discourse with efficient causality, and one leaves no room, no potency for the will and intellect to move. Everything turns upon the picture that comes to mind when one employs the word 'form'.

### 3.2.5 The noetic form of grace

Thus the necessity of a third, and final, Thomistic retrieval. If grace is not an object (in our empirically inclined world), if it is not substance (in the world of medieval ontology), then what does it mean to perceive grace? How does one perceive that which does not stand within the world? Is grace meant to be perceived? How does one perceive that which, if it were to stand within the world, could not possibly play the role that the Christian tradition assigns to it, that of being the point of relationship to the divine?

W. Norris Clarke notes a crucial distinction between Thomas and Aristotle over the use of form, a division that reaches Thomas through his dependence upon Neoplatonic thought (Clarke 1994: 65–88). Plato's notion of infinity remained akin to that of indigenous peoples. Infinity lacks form, which is understood as intelligibility. It is the place, the domain, of chaos precisely because it has not been ordered. In Plato, the limited can know perfection because it has been ordered by form. The unlimited is chaotic. Aristotle's approach is the same. '[I]t is absurd and impossible to suppose that the unknowable and indeterminate should contain and determine . . . For the matter and the infinite are contained inside what contains them, while it is form which contains' (*Phys.* III. 6. 207a30–7).

However, Thomas, true to his intellectualism, sees form as essentially unlimited, which it should be, if intelligibility and God are seen as one (*ens et verum convertuntur*). Clarke writes that Thomas accepts the Greek perspective intact, 'but he adds to it another dimension, so to speak, in which the relations are reversed and matter also appears as limiting form. This new dimension, however, can have meaning only within the framework of some kind of participation doctrine, where form itself would be conceived either *modo Platonico*, as subsisting separately in its own right as perfect plenitude or, for St. Thomas, a pre-existent idea in the mind of a Creator' (1994: 73).<sup>25</sup> In Thomas matter limits form, which is to say intelligibility.

<sup>25</sup> Rocca 2004: 221 in n. 31 is useful here: 'For Aristotle, act is equated with form, which is opposed to the potentiality of matter and temporality and as such is eternal. For Aquinas, being as created act is still different from the form, which is itself potential with respect to being.' In the light of Genesis, Aquinas does not take form as a given. In questioning its origin, he noetically steps outside it.

The human mind reverses the process, progressively liberating intelligibility from matter. 'To say that "being" is "intelligible" is to say that ultimately "that which is" can be measured in terms created by intellect, not that intellect is measured by norms discoverable in "that which is." It is because of the natural power of the "agent intellect" to create intelligible forms that we are able to understand that which we experience. It is not merely because the world is the way that it is' (Preller 1967: 54–5). Each act of insight is then something of a return to divine intelligibility. The most misleading of all possible pictures would be to view form as a type of cookie cutter working its way through some amorphous material. On the contrary, form is that intelligibility which must be liberated from matter through human noesis.<sup>26</sup>

To understand grace's unique role as a form and why, as a form, grace for Thomas is intrinsically linked to insight, it helps to examine a parallel Thomistic language game. Thomas will speak of charity as the form of the virtues because it explains their common purpose (*ST II–II* q. 23 a. 8). Two orders of discourse are being employed. Every virtue is ordered toward some end and is thus defined as the habit that would actualize human potency toward that end. But human beings have as many teleological ends as they have activities. What unites them? Nothing on the same level as those ends. Nothing can on that level. Every activity is perfectly explained at the level of the activity. Some process of abstraction needs to occur, incorporating a myriad of language games into a unity.

When Thomas asserts that charity gives form to all the other virtues, he is not raising one member of a set of virtues to preeminent status. He is rather interpreting all human activity in the light of his presupposition, that it is ordered toward God and hence toward relationship, and the name for the apex of human relations is love.

<sup>26</sup> Burrell 1979: 16 is useful here: 'Furthermore, by quite another line of reasoning, the only "simple things" accessible to reason are those formal features themselves: matter and form, potency and act. But these do not present themselves as particulars that we encounter. We arrive at them only by a reductive analysis which finds them presupposed to the things we do encounter. Thus we cannot even call them "things" properly speaking. They are rather constituent principles of things, and for that reason radically incomplete.' As Burrell sees it, the issue is one of confusing what Aristotle would call the 'universal principles' of logic with the 'proper principles' germane to any specific enquiry. A sure sign of this confusion is the reification of concepts.

Remember that a form is always that which allows the human mind to bring the many (experienced) into the unity of the (noetic) one.<sup>27</sup>

So when Thomas says that charity is the form of the virtues, one can, of course, contest his heuristic ordering. The uniquely human need for heuresis itself, however, demands that, if one spurns charity, which for Aquinas operates in the field of the virtues as the God-quotient, one is compelled to substitute some other teleological end. The alternative is to view human activity as purposeless.

Yet when one fails to see the heuristic game afoot, one begins to pose causal questions that are as unanswerable as they are muddling. To use an old example, when one has been shown all about Cambridge, one cannot then reasonably ask, unless one has misunderstood the use of the term, to see the university. What the university represents is not on the same heuristic level as the places that fill the city map of Cambridge. Words do not correspond to objects outside of language. Every word draws its meaning from the linguistic context in which it is used, and the only way to know that meaning is to examine grammatically the language used (Wittgenstein 1967: 22e; §47).

Though in certain instances, and we will need to return to them, Thomas will speak of grace as an efficient cause, that which causes something to occur through its causal, same-level operations, the more fundamental causality of grace is formal.<sup>28</sup> A formal cause is

<sup>27</sup> Lonergan 1958: 367 insists that 'form', even in Aristotle, represents intelligibility. '[B]eing can be defined by us only indirectly, and so Aristotle was unable to assign any specific act of understanding that resulted in the conceptual content of being. However, the conspicuous type of acts of understanding is the insight that grasps intelligible form emergent in sensible data; and so Aristotle assigned the ontological principle, form, as the ground of being in things and the cognitional act of grasping form as the insight from which originates the conceptual content, being.'

<sup>28</sup> 'One constantly-recurring principle in our texts is this: grace and charity, like all other forms, have two effects. In *actu primo* they are principles of being, perfecting the essence of the soul and the will in supernatural being; this is strictly formal causality. In *actu secundo* they are principles of operation: thus they exercise efficient causality' (Van Roo 1955: 158). Cf. chapter VII of Trent's *Decree of Justification*. The Council takes up all of the traditional Aristotelian categories of causality and applies them to grace, though preeminence is given to final causality (DS 1529; ND 1932).

Lonergan's early work on grace is useful here, particularly his treatment of the post-Thomas theory of 'vital act'. Thomas saw all activity as having been moved into act by God as efficient cause of the world, albeit not directly in the case of every conceivable activity. God must actualize all potencies. Later scholastics tended to ignore this essential understanding, and saw potencies as actuating themselves, which then raises the question of how God cooperates with created causality. See Stebbins 1995: 107–10.

understood as giving direction, or purpose, to activity.<sup>29</sup> For Thomas, imbued with the dialogical relationship revealed in salvation history, to say that the soul is the formal cause of the body's activities within the world is to say that the subject, which animates those activities, is ultimately one destined for relationship with God.

Post-Christian discourse continues to employ the word in just this fashion. We speak of physiological illness; we speak of being psychologically disturbed; but when one interlocutor says to another, 'I'm sick in my very soul', he is immediately understood as forwarding the language game to another level, one which doesn't necessarily preclude the two previous ones. To be sick in one's soul is to assert that one no longer knows one's place in the world, one's ultimate disposition over against the world. Trying to clarify if one is physically, psychologically, or metaphysically ill is to seek a clarification based upon a muddled misinterpretation of language games.

Returning to the causality of grace in St Thomas, Van Roo writes, 'The analogy constantly employed is that of ordered movers. It would not suffice to explain how in the act we find the effects of two or more movers, as if the moving principles converged upon the act, or exercised a parallel causality. Rather, the lower virtue is impregnated with the force of the higher: the first and principal mover has its proper effect on the act *through* the subordinated movers which are its instruments' (Van Roo 1955: 173). One is again forced back upon the act of perception. Each mover is identified as that which gives form, or cohesive unity, at its level of operation. Thomas doesn't call the soul the form of the body because the body needs a Cartesian driver. The word 'soul' designates what Thomas perceives to be the destiny of the human person precisely as corporeally present within the world. The word 'grace' is not an assertion that God is ultimately the only actor on the human scene. It is rather the assertion that all human activity is ordered toward, and therefore collected into, a form which, ultimately, simply *is* interpersonal relationship. Confuse the levels of perception, here meaning levels of formal cause, and one opens the never-to-be-shut door of the problem of the relationship between divine omnipotence and human freedom. Lonergan

<sup>29</sup> ST Ia-IIae q. 1 a. 6 co. 'Wherefore every beginning of perfection is ordained to complete perfection which is achieved through the last end.'



suggests that the entrance of metaphysics into theological discourse is ultimately due to this very question (1958: 527). ‘With increasing thoroughness this distinction between a natural order and a supervening gratuitous order was carried through by successive theologians to receive after the middle of the century its complete formulation and its full theological application in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. In speaking of grace as a form, a way has been found to speak of grace in relationship to nature that recognizes divine activity without negating human freedom.’

In his early work *Grace and Freedom*, Lonergan traced the entrance of Aristotelian thought through the early scholastics, ultimately showing both the advances that Thomas’s synthesis represented over his medieval predecessors and the subtle recapitulation of the Augustinian nuptial relationship, which the saint translated from history into nature. The nuptial relationship demands that two distinct subjects engage the other. Lonergan credits Aquinas with a synthesis that doesn’t allow the autonomy of the human subject to be subsumed by the activity of the divine.

In the commentary on the *Sentences*, then, the problem of remedying human deficiency is met by considering the alternatives of external intervention and internal change. Either the rule of rectitude, divine wisdom, intervenes whenever man is about to act; or else that rule somehow becomes the inherent form of the potency to be regulated. But the former solution is unsatisfactory: interference is always a species of violence, and though, no doubt, divine interference would make man’s operation proper, it would leave man himself just as bad as he had been.

Lonergan notes that Aquinas takes up the vocabulary of Aristotle, with all its emphasis upon nature, and yet manages to make of nature something which is responsive to historical activity, which is to say, to the actual entrance of the divine into the world:

On the other hand, if one examines the nature of habits and dispositions, one finds that they constitute precisely the type of internal change required: they make the external rule of right action the internal form of the faculty’s operation. A disposition is such a form in its incipient stages, when it is not well established and may easily be lost. A habit is such a form brought to perfection and, as it were, grafted on nature. For habits cling to us as does nature; they give operation the spontaneity and the delight characteristic of

natural action; they make arts and skills as unimpeded and free as the use of one's own possessions. (Lonergan 2000: 45)<sup>30</sup>

When the formal causality of grace is eclipsed, one is left with an efficient causality that seems repugnant on two levels. It inadequately represents human freedom, and it seems to make God an actor within the world, rather than a formal cause that orients the world to itself. Stebbins argues that Lonergan correctly interprets Aquinas on form in a manner that helps to clarify the causality of grace. As Lonergan reads him, 'Aquinas does not conceive of form as the efficient cause of operation since form stands to operation as potency to act; an operation as received perfection is, to use his shorthand, a *pati* (an operation and effect in the sense that it limits both operation and any consequent effect to a given species). Thus, the Avicennist and Aristotelian modes of expression are compatible with one another: form is both a principle (but not an efficient cause) of operation and consequent effect, and passive or receptive potency with respect to operation.' One might say that a form delineates an area of operation, a venue of being. A human being and a dog share a form that involves the capacity to see. A rock, which lacks the same form, does not engage in the activity. Yet simply possessing the form does not mean that one is currently seeing anything. One might be asleep. For Aquinas the form must be moved into operation through the activity of an agent.

Thus in considering the formal causality of grace in the world, one can assert that grace alone does nothing. Grace is our apperception of a noetic unity, a unique form, a way of seeing elements within the world as ordered toward the activity of God. And, as Lonergan insists, one can always fail to perceive the form. One can, of course, speak of the efficient causality of grace, and faith demands that one does so. Here one is, theologically speaking, stepping out of the world

<sup>30</sup> Thomas teaches that we only know the nature of the intellect through its acts. *ST I* q. 87 a. 1. '[I]t is clear that the intellect, so far as it knows material things, does not know save what is in act: and hence it does not know primary matter except as proportionate to form... Therefore in its essence the human mind is potentially understanding. Hence it has in itself the power to understand, but not to be understood, except as it is made actual.' One could say that Thomas constructs the stability of human nature upon its ability to unite the transitory, that which we call history.

to assert that this act of perception, and the virtuous acts that may follow in response to it, are the result of God's activity vis-à-vis the world.

Paradoxically, Luther, who so acutely perceived grace as active within his life, when it came to Aristotelian metaphysics, chose to emphasize the efficient causality of grace in a manner that precluded human freedom. Either God is active or we are. Two different language games are in play; Luther championed one, formal causality, but sought to explain it by way of the other, efficient. The direction of efficient causality moves from God to us, at least as the language game allows us to envision that perspective, not actually standing on the divine side of the movement. The other, equally vital language game of formal causality is our way of speaking of grace as we experience it, in our noetic movement from a myriad of elements to a form that draws them into itself. Emphasizing the formal causality of grace, one grants that grace is itself, as least as it concerns us, an act of perception. We see a noetic pattern that reveals the presence of God. Aquinas: 'Inasmuch as grace is a certain accidental quality, it does not act upon the soul efficiently, but formally, as whiteness makes a surface white' (*ST I-II*, q. 111 a. 1 c).

It is after this act of perception that the fundamental option of the Western religious experience asserts itself. All of the activity that we call the world comes from the creative impulse of God. Therefore, religiously speaking, God is the efficient cause of all that exists in its act of existence. One must then correctly insist that God is the efficient cause of grace within us, and Aquinas does. 'God does not justify us without ourselves, because whilst we are being justified we consent to God's justification by a movement of our free-will. Nevertheless this movement is not the cause of grace, but the effect; hence the whole operation pertains to grace' (*ST I-II*, q. 111 a. 2 c).

Yet the formal causality of grace suggests that the space within being that God opens for human response, the spot designated as creation, the world as history, depends upon the quality that most decisively distinguishes the human person from nature and most surely reflects our divine origin, the human intellect. Here metaphysics is serving the gospel, which insists that the grace offered in Jesus Christ must first be perceived in order to be effective.

Returning to a question posed earlier, which can now be restated with an additional nuance: if the grace of being is necessarily a silent grace, because ‘what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’, even though this silence is the fruit of mysticism and not disdain, and if the grace of revelation cannot simply appear as one among many words competing for attention in the modern world, but must reveal itself as that toward which human life is intrinsically ordered, how do we speak a word that is grace? Another way of putting the question is to ask what changes must occur in the metaphysics employed by Christians to open dialogue with the modern world.

# 4

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## Grace as Meaning in the World

### 4.1 WHAT IS A WORLD?

#### 4.1.1 Grace and the world

Would the experience that is grace be more comprehensible to our contemporaries if one said that grace is the apperception of being addressed by the world? Here the assertion is that grace properly connotes the *experience* of the human person who *perceives* the *world* itself to be *speaking*, to be addressing the self through the perception of *signs* in the variegated elements that make up the world. The evaluation of such an apparently simple statement requires an examination of its constituent elements. In doing so, I will continue to juxtapose the work of Wittgenstein, Lonergan, and Rahner with the assumption that the linguistic turn of Wittgenstein's work does not invalidate the fundamental premisses of Transcendental Thomism. On the contrary, it only highlights the dynamic intellectualism by which that movement characterized human knowing (cf. Klein 2003). If grace, speaking of its human side, is an act of perception, then the metaphysics of epistemology that Transcendental Thomism deployed seems essential in any consideration of it.

#### 4.1.2 The self and the world

First, a consideration of the complexity involved in the use of simple words like 'self' and 'world'. In using the term 'world', I am not referencing an incredibly large bundle of objects, the collection of all the things one might putatively catalogue as being 'out there'. But

I am also not eliminating what might be called 'the external world' from discussion, retreating into the self of idealism, with the world collapsing into only a shell of its former self, existing as only a projection of the knower. The complex relationship between the knowing self and the world that is known, bound together in an even tighter Gordian knot after the linguistic turn, will continue to experience permutations for some time. In what follows, however, several foundational assumptions are operative. I am presuming that (1) The self and the world are inextricable; (2) They are not the same thing; and (3) Each is ordered toward the other. I believe it theologically tenable to accept the post-modern thesis that the self is composed by that which it calls the world. Indeed, I want subsequently to argue that the assertion is a fundamental, though differently expressed, premiss of Thomistic epistemology.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein explored to what extent the self and the world are circumincessive, though he correctly insisted that a 'self' still eludes the world. To his mind the mutually posited nature of self and world explains why 'solipsism, when its implications are strictly followed out, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it' (1961: 58; §5.64). Of course the solipsist is wrong in thinking that the world is reduced to one thinker, but the solipsist is correct in asserting that for any given thinker the world and the self are coterminous.

The self is not one small element within the world (§5.631). On the contrary, the world coalesces around the self. Yet Wittgenstein refuses to dismiss the self as a tissue of linguistic creation, because something still *engages* the world (§5.641). 'The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is a limit of the world' (§5.632).

Perhaps the problem of the disappearing self in the post-modern world is best addressed by Aquinas's conception of the human person as a potency striving toward act. If the world of the human person is a farrago of perceptions and patterned discourses, without a self at its center, then we have something akin to a computer that simply computes without *being* a self. The problem with this picture is that a virus is growing in the computer. Something is moving from potency to act, which is another way of pointing to that spot at the center of my world that has an agenda, a project of self-completion,

an innate desire to become something it isn't yet through its interaction with the world.<sup>1</sup>

Still, the problem remains that the self and the world are so circumincessive that it's difficult to speak of one without involving the other. If this essay oscillates between the two, it is because the status of the world requires further examination before the self's project of completion within it can be fully appreciated.

### 4.1.3 Using the word 'world'

In Kant the world is an a priori, a spatial-temporal skein by which all synthetic propositions are referenced. We need the concept of a world in order to make statements about how we find things in the world. For Kant, the concept of a world is a heuristic device, one that is fundamental for human noesis, but which does not necessarily imply its own existence. We have to think a world as a concept of synthesis; one doesn't have to exist.

Like the language game of 'nature', on one level, the word 'world' lacks an ostensive referent and is, on some levels, seemingly superfluous. This validity of this assertion can readily be seen by comparing the function of the two words. No empirical theory needs to employ the word 'nature' in a protocol statement; indeed, the concept of nature is too all-embracing to be part of such a statement. It cannot be empirically verified. Yet every empirical theory rests within the heuristic field that is nature. Without a heuristic horizon, without the noetic presupposition that each theory finds a place in a *skein* of purposefully affirmed theories, the human person's fundamental confidence in our myriad acts of engagements with the world would be called into question. Nature cannot become subject to empirical theory or verification, because nature makes both possible.

<sup>1</sup> See Farrell 1994 for a historically grounded, and perceptive, discussion of the fate of the self vis-à-vis the world in post-modern thought. He argues that the thinning of the world and the subsequent hegemony of the self-creating subject can be traced back to the nominalistic theology of the late medieval period, which viewed God's will as arbitrarily related to the world. He suggests that much of modern philosophy seems premised upon the subject assuming the capricious role of this nominalistic God.

It serves as their heuristic foundation and cannot therefore be called into question by either.

Similarly, the word 'world' does not *stand for* an object, or a bundle of them, but rather for the very ability of the human mind to collate phenomena, to bring them into a noetic unity. This is why Kant insisted that human beings must 'think' a world. Wittgenstein highlights the unique character of human questioning by insisting that it must somewhere come to an end, and this is the role that the concept of nature plays for our thought.

The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena (Wittgenstein 1961: 70; §6.371). Thus people today stop at the laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable, just as God and Fate were treated in past ages. And in fact both are right and wrong; though the view of the ancients is clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained. (§6.372)<sup>2</sup>

Still, as Victor Preller insists, 'the world is the *only* object of *unquestionable* reference in our conceptual framework' (1967: 204), meaning that whatever a putative speaker might wish to assert, he or she must somehow link any possible assertion into the conceptual skein that is the world. We simply don't wield languages that begin in a different place. The concept of the world functions existentially in much the same way that nature functions empirically. We never encounter the world, because we never withdraw from the world. Hence, strictly speaking, it cannot come before the human mind as an *object* of cognition. We encounter things within the world, and the human person must somehow bring them into a cohesive whole. Put another way, if they cannot appear as an element within the world, they simply cannot appear.

Why? A linguistic analysis of the word 'world' offers a fascinating answer. Obviously, the word's denotation cannot be shown by ostensive definition. If the *Tractatus's* goal of one-to-one correspondence had been correct, one would need to point out all of the objects *in* the

<sup>2</sup> The question of where thought should, or could, come to rest occupied Wittgenstein's final years, and the notes in which he outlined his solution are collected in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (1969).



world before teaching another the meaning of the word. After surveying the world's contents, one could then putatively say to another, 'Now this, then, is the world.'<sup>3</sup> But of course such an exercise has never occurred, yet we very quickly learn how to use the word 'world'. If there is an element of family resemblance about the many ways that we use the word, it is this: the world is always that which surrounds whatever reference we have brought under consideration. Saying to another, 'I want to see the world before I die' does not involve producing a travel itinerary. It simply means that the speaker wants to see whatever has not yet been seen. If one were pressed to produce such an itinerary, the rapid response would be that it is not exhaustive. Indeed, we use the word to indicate that which cannot be exhaustively described. The word connotes that which simply cannot be denoted.

The world, then, is always a way of introducing into language the *whither* of human knowledge, and this is true whether that *whither* be envisioned as spatially expansive or as expanding the infinite depth of distance between two fixed points. In either case, we employ the word 'world' to reference the *whither* that always lies beyond whatever is 'at hand'.

Wittgenstein employed a *Tractarian* picture of the world similar to Kant's. Every affirmed fact fitted into a place in 'logical space' (1961: 5; §1.13). In the *Investigations*, that map of the world had to be modified, because logic could no longer be viewed as transcending the individual language games being employed. Another way of saying the same is to insist that what one is trying to achieve in any given noetic skein will fundamentally affect the heuristic value of each element within it.<sup>4</sup> The great advance of the *Investigations* over

<sup>3</sup> Of course the difficulty is philosophical, not empirical. Even if the world represented the set of all the objects within the world, there would remain linguistic questions such as determining what counts as an object, where one object ends and another begins, and what brings objects into unities. And those problems aren't solved in shifting discourse from objects to phenomena (Kant) or events (Whitehead). Our relationship to the word 'world' is part of the perennial question of Greek philosophy, the relationship of the one and the many.

<sup>4</sup> Which would seem to be an assertion at least as old as Aristotle. 'The question might be asked, what we mean by saying that we must become just by doing just acts, and temperate by doing temperate acts; for if men do just and temperate acts, they are already just and temperate, exactly as, if they do what is grammatical or musical they are proficient in grammar and music.' *Nico. Eths.* 1105a.

the *Tractatus* is the recognition that one cannot separate the act of knowing from the knower who acts.

And yet one of the most stable elements in the transition from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations* is the irreducible status of the knower. ‘What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that “the world is my world”. The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world—not a part of it’ (Wittgenstein 1961: 58; §5.641). More succinctly stated, ‘I am my world’ (1961: 57; §5.63). Or, as the *Investigations* put it, the world of a lion cannot adequately be translated, because we do not *live* in the world of the lion (Wittgenstein 1967: 223e).

#### 4.1.4 Language and the world

It should be obvious that, so defined, no two human beings share the very same world, and yet no human being dwells completely alone in a world. That worlds are composites of personal experience explains their individuality; Wittgenstein revealed their foundational unity when he rejected the possibility of private languages. However I perceive my world, I must still use our common words for the very act of perception. We do not live lives as isolated, Cartesian ghosts who throw out linguistic life-lines to each other. On the contrary, language is the medium in which one knows both the self and the other. Thus to speak a language is to dwell in a world with those who share my language. It is to open the self to an activity that ultimately provides the real foundation for all communion.

Language is birthed from, and oriented toward, desire. It reflects and embodies that which a linguistic group, and the individual speaker, finds significant. Contrast Wittgenstein on language and desire with Heidegger (1962: 263): ‘Uncovering is a way of Being for Being-in-the-world. Circumspective concern, or even that concern in which we tarry and look at something uncovers entities within-the-world.’ And, as we have already seen, for Augustine, love has a noetic dimension. To signify is to speak, to find a place of expression within language and thus to enter into the consciousness of the knower. It is ultimately human desire that grants everything so signified its voice.

The preeminent American interpreter of Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell, is useful here in illustrating why ‘not-to-be-named’ equals ‘not-to-enter-the-world’. Referring to a young girl he writes:

But although I didn’t tell her, and she didn’t learn, either what the word ‘kitty’ means or what a kitty is, if she keeps leaping and I keep looking and smiling, she will learn both. I have wanted to say: Kittens—what we call ‘kittens’—do not exist in her world yet, she has not acquired the forms of life which contain them. They do not exist in something like the way cities and mayors will not exist in her world until long after pumpkins and kittens do; or like the way God or love or responsibility or beauty do not exist in our world; we have not mastered, or we have forgotten, or we have distorted, or learned through fragmented models, the forms of life which could make utterances like ‘God exists’ or ‘God is dead’ or ‘I love you’ or ‘I cannot do otherwise’ or ‘Beauty is but the beginning of terror’ bear all the weight they could carry, express all they could take from us. We do not know the meaning of the words. We look away and leap around. (1979: 172–3)

Aquinas insisted that the intellect and the will are always co-involved, with primacy belonging to the intellect because something must be known to be desired.<sup>5</sup> Or, as Ovid succinctly put it, ‘Ignoti nulla cupido’ (*Ars amatoria*, III. 397). His fundamental intuition is surprisingly contemporary. For Wittgenstein, language games arise because of our dynamic interaction with reality. They are always activity-oriented, serving a purpose determined by what humans want of the world. From the perspective of both thinkers, either the one from the thirteenth century or the other from the twentieth, what seems most out of date is the passive, inert, Kantian knower of the eighteenth, the one who cannot encounter the world outside the self because there is no exit from the a priori strictures of the human mind.

Furthermore, no one can step out of the world, because language creates the world. Thought is a function of language, not its prelude. One can reject any given worldview. It cannot be done, however, from a presuppositionless place. Here it is helpful to contrast a heuristic world and a worldview. The knowing self is necessarily co-involved in a heuristic world. Language is the seamless medium in

<sup>5</sup> A similar circumincession is found in Canon 4 of the 16th Council of Carthage, affirming that grace not only illumines the intellect but also strengthens the power to love the good (DS226; ND 1902).

which both the self and the horizon of knowledge coexist. In contrast, a worldview is always a skeletal sketch of a heuristic world. It's what is produced when, for the purpose of conceptual clarification, the knowing self is extracted from the world. Someone else's world may be spoken of as a worldview, but no one should think that what remains in this conceptual desiccation accurately corresponds to the self-implicating, heuristic medium that is the world. The self has been withdrawn.

We often employ the word 'cosmos' to express a worldview that is someone else's world, or our own, but the latter usage occurs only when we make ourselves an object of scrutiny. When we speak of a cosmos, we picture something akin to a snow globe, something that the mind can hold. Any world can be made into a cosmos, except the one in which I actually dwell. Why? Because the mind requires language, and language demands the ordered polarities of self and world. One cannot think chaotically, cannot think outside one's own world.

In other words, as Heidegger insisted, we don't really see the world the way we think we do, the way we characterize ourselves as thinking under the hegemony of the empirical sciences. The world is not simply an equation waiting to be explicated, and knowledge is not simply 'taking a look'.<sup>6</sup> If the human spirit did manage to 'solve the world', something would still remain, dynamic, unsatisfied, chafing. Every 'look' co-involves the one seeing. It necessarily implicates his or her own drive toward fulfillment.

#### 4.1.5 Four views of the world

Having considered the meaning of a world and its relationship to grace, the challenge of preaching that relationship is perhaps best introduced by comparing and contrasting four worldviews: those

<sup>6</sup> See Heidegger 1962: 257–62 for his refutation of knowledge as 'taking a look' or 'capturing' rather than Being making itself manifest in knowing. At 261, 'The *Being-true* (*truth*) of the assertion must be understood as *Being-uncovering*. Thus truth has by no means the structure of an agreement between knowing and the object in the sense of a likening of one entity (the subject) to another (the Object). Being-true as Being-uncovering, is in turn ontologically possible only on the basis of Being-in-the-world. This latter phenomenon, which we have known as the basic state of Dasein, is the *foundation* for the primordial phenomenon of truth.'

typical of indigenous peoples, the Grecian, the Christian, and the modern.

Indigenous peoples thought, and still think, of the world as self-enclosed, though 'enclosed' isn't the most apt word because it suggests the presence of something lying beyond the enclosure. Perhaps one should say that the world is simply what is. For the indigenous person, the salient questions have not yet been posed, producing the stimulus that would alter the self-evident quality of the world.

The best picture of this worldview is that of a large campfire on an otherwise darkened plain. The cosmos is like the aura of light emitted from the fire. At a certain point, it peters out. And it is a cosmos in which divine agency simply represents a higher sphere of activity. The gods, or spirits, share the world with humans. They are everywhere in the world, though at work at a hierarchically distinct level (cf. Aristotle, *Meta.* 1026a17–18).

With the advent of nature, the Greek mind, quite helpfully, insists that the world is not full of persons. It is full of things, things which are not animate (*anima* = soul), but rather can be understood and manipulated by the human person because they follow an ordered, sequential pattern of cause and effect, one which can be mastered by the human mind. The divine must necessarily withdraw from this world, though it remains as that which stands surety for the world's purposefulness. The supreme God of Greek thought becomes the formal, exemplary cause of the world. He withdraws as the efficient cause. He must necessarily fall silent.

The Christian worldview insists that something has addressed the world. The world is suddenly, and radically, judged to be insufficient at the advent of the Other, the one who offers the promise of completion. The advent of address that occurs in Christianity is akin to the person who, upon falling in love, suddenly realizes the absolute insufficiency of the world before the arrival of the Beloved.

Note this basic but, for our purposes, trenchant characterization of the two Christian testaments by C. Ryder Smith:

In the New Testament it is taken for granted that all men are sinners (even though occasionally particular men are called 'righteous' in a relative sense), and that it is believers and believers alone who begin to be truly righteous. In it, therefore 'the Ways of God with the Good' becomes the 'The Ways of God

with Believers.' In the Old Testament, on the other hand, it is assumed that all men are not sinners and that there are good men as well as bad men in the world, or at any rate in Israel. (1956: 8)

The Christian's proclamation and experience of the self-as-sinner can also be seen as a way of expressing the novel interpretation that, because of what has been experienced within the Christ event, something is now recognized as previously lacking within the world. The world of nature has no sin. Only a world ordered toward a fulfillment can define the lack of this fulfillment as *harmartia* (a missing of the mark), as sin.

It's crucial to note that the world of the Christian believer *revealed* itself to be insufficient. The God of Christianity wasn't originally needed to explain inner-worldly causality. Early Christians essentially carried the same notions about *how* the world worked as their contemporaries. There were celestial powers and minor spirits, benign and malevolent, active *within* the world. Primitive Christian cosmology did not represent a radical break with its pagan past in terms of efficient causality. Christians simply insisted that, however the world worked, it worked to fulfill God's purposes and remained under God's control.<sup>7</sup>

The novelty that Judaism represents is the insistence that the world didn't have to be. The act of creation is itself a grace, a foundational favoring on the part of God. The novelty of Christianity is the revelation of the Beloved, the one who reveals the world as essentially purposeless, rendered futile now that the Beloved has appeared, that is, if the Beloved is not attained. In other words, the world's purpose, its finality, becomes a grace. Love is revealed as the world's efficient and final cause. It was created by love, and it is created for love. In either case, we are far removed from the prerevelatory understanding of the world as simply a given.

The modern world of natural science sees the world as essentially enclosed. What it lacks is both the experience of wonder and the recognition of the self's desire for transcendence, though the latter is

<sup>7</sup> Discussing the eve of the Reformation in Western Europe, Will Durant shows just how pervasive and long-lasting this view of pre-Grecian, inner-worldly causality was. As Durant points out, even when Christian authorities castigated the attention people gave to witches, astrology, sprites, etc., they nonetheless presumed both that these agencies existed and that they were effective (1935: 230–4).

evident in the modern person's revolt against the humanly restrictive world of science, a revolt that often reveals itself as existential anxiety. What does it mean to comprehend a world that remains indifferent to the presence of the knower, a world that will hum on, by virtue of the inexhaustible laws of nature, long after the knower has perished? Is it possible, however, to consider human anxiety itself as a grace, a form of silent speaking? We need to return to our contemporary definition of grace and ask what it would mean to be addressed by the world. Is it possible that even now the world is speaking?

## 4.2 SILENT SPEAKING

### 4.2.1 The meaning of silence

In the *Tractatus* the world is a noetic map, and the only speaking that might occur in its regard is a gnawing, existential sense of the map's insufficiency. 'The facts all contribute only to setting the problem, not to its solution' (Wittgenstein 1961: 73; §6.4321). 'It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists [§6.44]. To view the world sub specie aeterni is to view it as a whole—a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole—it is this that is mystical' (§6.45).

But wouldn't an epistemologically astute positivist still want to insist that, even if the acquisition of knowledge is active rather than passive, a co-engagement between knower and known, that which is mystical is clearly not speaking. Here 'not-speaking' means not presenting the self to engage the knower. That being the case, not-speaking implies inability to speak, which in turns implies non-existence. Not to speak within the world is to say nothing, and therefore to make no claim, existential or noetic, upon the knower.

But would one really want to assert that silence never speaks? After Wittgenstein, doesn't silence also derive its meaning from its usage, from its placement *within* a noetic skein? For example, if one says 'I love you' to another who is dearly loved, but about whose love-in-return the lover is not yet sure, and if the response is silence, would one conclude the non-existence of the Beloved? Quite the

contrary, one would sadly decide that, as one knows the Beloved, it is the Beloved's silence that has been most eloquent as a response. In other words, what silence 'says' depends entirely upon where it is encountered in a noetic skein.

The relationship of the knower to a possibly silent God is both a perennially poignant question and a good place to enter Aquinas's thought on the relationship between God and the world. The necessity of a Thomistic retrieval is again apparent, and Thomas is surprisingly modern in his epistemology. One might begin with the laconic assertion that Thomas doesn't think of God and humanity as dialoging within the world. Ultimately God doesn't speak like any other interlocutor within the world, because such a speaker would have to reside within the world itself. Given the previous discussion of the inexorable link between world and language, a God who simply spoke within the world would have to be a member of the world, not a dialogical partner with it. To use older, but clearly apt, language, one employed by Christians when they first characterized the deities of non-Christian religions, such a God would be an idol!<sup>8</sup>

Linguistic Thomism asks: is the apparent silence of God due to non-existence, or is it rather the necessary 'space' within which all human language, and hence the world, occurs? Thomas understands human knowledge to be sensory-based, which is another way of saying that human knowledge is born in this world, not in some dream of another. He rejects the Platonist and Augustinian notions that human beings somehow possess intuitive knowledge of reality, so that, when we recognize a rock to be a rock, it is because we entered this world with some God-given, occult knowledge of rocks, which lay dormant until one had presented itself to us.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, all human knowledge for Thomas is sensory-based and conceptual (*ST I* q. 86 a. 6 co.; *Sum. c. gen. II. 60*). Human knowledge

<sup>8</sup> Preller (1967: 206), always attuned to the epistemological breach between the sciences and the humanities, correctly asserts, 'How God can be included in the act of taking an observable event to be what it is, is not expressible in any ordinary or natural way, and would certainly not be continuous with cognition in other fields. Religious faith does not and cannot share a "common epistemological structure with cognition in other fields" unless God himself can be said to be an ordinary and nonproblematic object of human perception.'

<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein opens his second masterpiece with the same rejection. We do not enter the world with knowledge (here language) of another world (1967: 2e).



in Thomism is not intuitive, especially not our knowledge of the divine!

The Transcendental Thomists and Wittgenstein stand on common ground in insisting that the world and the self, the known and the knower, are co-involved. Therefore, if the world seems silent, if it does not *speak* God, one can either decide that a putative divine being does not exist, which is the conclusion of Positivism, or one can suggest that the very desire for speech on the part of God paradoxically represents ‘a silent speaking’, which is the conclusion of Transcendental Thomism. In other words, when one examines the fundamental constitution of the human person, does the human *desire* for transcendence itself speak, say something, which is to say, give expression to, the possible fulfillment of that desire?

Both Lonergan and Rahner read Aquinas in the light of Joseph Maréchal’s post-Kantian retrieval of the medieval philosopher. What these thinkers share with Wittgenstein is a rejection of Kantian epistemology. Maréchal insisted that Kant had conceived of human noesis in terms too static. He succinctly asked, ‘At the starting point of metaphysics, do we really encounter a purely passive intelligence, one totally indifferent to a *yes* or a *no*, a type of reflecting surface, reduced to maintaining the proper ordering of the images which glide over it’ (1964: 46)? And he argued that Aquinas’s understanding of the human person, as a finite intelligence ordered toward actualization of its potential by striving toward virtually unconditional knowledge, revealed an understanding of human noesis both more dynamic than Kant’s and one fundamentally more true to human life as we experience it. In responding to Kant, these thinkers agreed with Kant that the world is not simply what is ‘out there’, but they rejected the Kantian notion that human intelligence is nothing more than the passive reception of a reality conditioned by spatial–temporal filters.

#### 4.2.2 Addressed by the world?

So what does it mean to be addressed *by the world*? For Wittgenstein, and perhaps for many a contemporary person, it is a question of a troubling silence, but silence can only be troubling within an existentially affirmed relationship. The only thing that makes silence

troubling is the expectation of being addressed. If there could be a human being who has no desire of being addressed, silence would *say* nothing.

For a person of faith, to be addressed by the world means that elements within the world coalesce into forms that are understood to be signs, and the world itself, the *whither* of human knowledge, begins to speak, to invite the human person by means of these signs. It addresses the individual and awaits a response. Of course these signs are not objects within the world, though they may well be composed of them. As *signs*, they are forms, noetic appropriations of the world. In Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* the world was made up of objects, corresponding to ostensibly defined words, which is why he had to assert, 'There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical' (1961: 73; §6.522). In the *Investigations*, however, it would be more correct to say that the world is full of forms.

Note a fundamental assertion. The world always demands a response, and a human being cannot fail to respond to the world. The Transcendental Thomists and Wittgenstein are again in agreement. Although impossible to fully execute, even a decision to ignore the world would still be a form of engagement, because the world is that before which the human person must take a stance. Why? Because the world is that medium in which human life exists and fructifies. Our life knows no existence apart from the world.<sup>10</sup> The world cannot be thought of as static, because the human person cannot refuse to know. Knowledge itself is always expansive. We cannot abandon heuresis, because we are heuresis!<sup>11</sup>

One must not begin with the wrong picture, that of an autonomous human subject surveying what is 'out there' in the world. Then the world itself becomes only a object of enquiry, as well as a potential object of exploitation. Already in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein rejected the metaphysical 'I' standing at the edge of the world. The self validates or judges the world. The world 'belongs-to' the self.

<sup>10</sup> One might fruitfully contrast this discussion of the human person vis-à-vis 'the world' with Heidegger's concept of the human person as *Da-Sein*, the one thrown into the being of that which is.

<sup>11</sup> A fundamental assertion of my article 'Act and Potency in Wittgenstein' (Klein 2006).

‘What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that “the world is my world”’ (1961: 58; §5.641). This is why the self cannot be made a part of the world, not even a small part at the world’s edge.

The picture of a knowing self within the world is even more inappropriate in the *Investigations*. After the linguistic turn, reality does not stand ‘over and against’ the human person. It is rather the place of self-completion, the medium in which the human person moves from latency to completion, or as Aquinas would write, from potency to act. One only becomes the self through engagement with the world. The human person stands in essential communion with the world. Where one ends and the other begins can no longer be demarcated, yet two foci of engagement remain. The human person as constituted by his or her communion with the world stands at the core of Karl Rahner’s theological anthropology, which is why his writings on grace cannot be understood without reference to his foundational work, *Spirit in the World*.

#### 4.2.3 Rahner and the *reditio completa in seipsum*

To understand the full significance of being addressed by the world, consider the implications that Rahner drew from Aquinas’s *reditio completa in seipsum*. The Thomistic teaching of a knowing-self going out of the self in order to return to itself, in short, knowledge as the act by which the self is created, is as applicable in the twenty-first century as it was in the thirteenth. Thomas taught that the knowing self is not a collector of facts, a noetic automaton, that simply accumulates within the self a record of what is ‘out there’. On the contrary, one names the world, creates it within language, in order to engage it. The knowing self is then, in the deepest sense, a desirous self. That is to say, the human person seeks to know because he or she desires, seeks that which is beyond the self in order to engage that which can complete the self. In every act of knowledge, we simply *are* a relationship of potency and act, a relationship between that which desires and the fulfillment of those desires. This active striving is Rahner’s point of entry into Thomistic studies, and his work on grace is meaningless and misleading without a firm foundation in Rahner’s early work.

For example, wags often like to assert that Rahner's anthropological turn in theology makes everything graced, an unnuanced assertion that inevitably leads to the question of just what sort of *object* grace must be if it is so pervasive. There follows a second question: whether or not Rahner is faithful to the foundations of Christian thought on grace, since he seems to view it as pervading the entire world, seemingly independent from any Christian dispensation. Such questions represent misunderstandings that are only possible with the wrong picture. With the right picture, in this case an adequate understanding of Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge, one would want to affirm that grace is both all-pervasive and highly particular. As will be shown, these initially paradoxical assertions are both due to the Christic character of grace. Grace is a fundamental existential of the human person, though it need not be, and indeed often is not, an existential that the human being actualizes. Everything turns upon the human acceptance of the divine initiative.

The sole adequate ingress to Rahner's insights on grace lies in his first and seminal, and unfortunately somewhat formidable, work, *Spirit in the World*, an exhaustive analysis of Question 84, Article 7 of the *prima pars* of Aquinas's *Summa theologica*. There, in challenging Kant, Rahner emphasizes the active engagement of the knower with reality. He follows Joseph Maréchal in insisting that human knowledge represents a positing of each affirmed element of the world against a horizon which is potentially unlimited. The world does not come before the human intellect as a conceptually affirmed object. It cannot be made the direct focus of thought. It is rather the presupposition behind each affirmative positing of individual concepts. Rahner retrieves this Thomistic teaching by insisting that all human knowing involves a return to the phantasm, our sensory experience of the world.

Following Aquinas, Rahner will speak of an 'agent intellect', a way of highlighting the dynamic acquisitiveness of human knowing. From that which is received in the senses, which is designated as the *species expressa*, the agent intellect abstracts. It then forms an inner, intellectual word, the *species impressa*, essentially a universal concept, but it only affirms the validity of this intellectual abstraction if the abstraction itself can be posited against a virtually unlimited horizon of being. Put another way, whatever we think we now know,

having had a sensory experience, and having produced at least one universal concept about it, we only affirm ourselves as truly knowing when this noetically novel act finds insertion into a skein of previously affirmed acts.

Again, the horizon is not another object within the world. It is what Thomas would call an *excessus*. It expands as human knowledge grows. Rahner prefers to call it the *whither* (*Worhin*) of human knowledge, and the only grasping here must be anticipatory. His well-known *Vorgriff* does not grasp any 'thing' when it grasps the world.<sup>12</sup> What it ultimately 'grasps' is a fundamental, existential confidence in the world: that the *whither* is purposeful, not meaningless.

Rahner's understanding of grace is built upon this analysis of the human act of knowing. In the equally dense essay 'Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace', he takes up the Thomistic assertion that Being and knowledge are circumincessive (*ens et verum convertuntur*). Following Aquinas, Rahner insists that human knowledge is neither inert reception nor noetic subjugation on the part of the knower vis-à-vis the known. It rather involves a certain communion with what lies outside the self, since the knower is ordered toward the world and, conversely, all that lies within the world is ordered toward knowing. Thus

knowledge is not an 'intentional' stretching out of the knower to an object, it is not 'objectivity' in the sense of the going forth of the knower out of himself to something other, not an externally orientated entering into contact with an object by means of the cognitive faculty; it is primarily the being-present-to-itself (*Beisichsein*) of an entity, the inner illuminatedness of an entity for itself on the basis of its determinate grade of being (immateriality), it is a being-reflected-upon-itself (*Insichreflektiertheit*). (TI i. 327)<sup>13</sup>

Knowledge is being-present-to-one's-self, and for the human person this occurs through the *reditio* characteristic of human knowledge, a *species expressa* becoming a *species impressa* through the work

<sup>12</sup> Though the terms are not his, the concept certainly is: a worldview can be grasped, made an object of scrutiny; a world cannot.

<sup>13</sup> This is an indispensable article where the metaphysics of knowledge Rahner first worked out in *Spirit in the World* is brought to bear upon the question of grace. It's difficult to see how one could comprehend the piece's implication without some understanding of the previous work. See also Rahner 1968: 224–5.

of the agent intellect and the affirmative judgement. What appears to lie outside the knower, because of our orientation toward knowing, enters into the very self-constitution of the knowing person. Rahner insists that for Thomas the *species expressa* should not be understood as *representing* the Other, standing in its place; it is rather the *manifestation* of the Other, its way of being present to the knower.

It is only from this point of departure that it becomes really possible to conceive what is meant by *species* as the ontological ground of any knowledge. The *species* must not unhesitatingly be conceived of as the 'intentional image' of an object, made present in the mind in a non-real 'mental' way as a copy of the object due to the object's impression upon it. Rather it is primarily (i.e. if we reflect upon the nature of the *connatural species* of a cognitive power) an ontological determination of the knower as an entity in his own reality, this determination consequently being logically prior to knowledge as consciousness, and, because it shares or bestows the knower's determinate grade of being, also participating in the consciousness (being-reflected-upon-itself, being-present-to-itself) of this entity thus 'in act'. (*TI* i. 327)

The human person is that place where Being becomes conscious of itself, but it can only do this by connatural participation with non-sentient Being, the material world.

#### 4.2.4 The experience of grace

Arriving at the question of grace, Rahner links two discussions: the causality of grace *in via* and the justified person's knowledge of God after death, the *lumen gloriae*.

The life of grace, that is to say, and the life of future glory do not stand in a purely moral and juridical relation to each other, such that the latter is the reward of the former as merit; the life of glory is the definitive flowering (the 'manifestation,' the 'disclosure') of the life of divine sonship already possessed and merely 'hidden' for the moment. Hence grace, as the ontological basis of this supernatural life, is also an inner entitative principle (at least a partial principle) of the vision of God. (*TI* i. 326)

He begins by taking up Thomas's assertion that in the Beatific Vision God's own being takes the place of the species. Rahner argues that the divine being has a transforming effect upon the knower, just as the species does in an ordinary act of knowledge.

Thus *a posteriori* knowledge rests for St Thomas on an assimilation to the object entitatively determining the knower by means of the *species* as a reality of the knower's own being, through which the knower and the known are really 'the same thing.' The knower and the known do not become one through knowledge (as consciousness); but because they are entitatively one (whether this be immediately or by means of a real determination, representing the object, of the knower as an entity, i.e. by means of the *species*), the knower knows the object. (*TI* i. 328)<sup>14</sup>

Again Rahner rejects the notion that knowledge is about a subject knowing something essentially extrinsic to the self. For Rahner the self is never truly separable from that which lies outside the self. As a Spirit-in-the-world, the world does not lie over against the subject in the act of knowing, whether that act be interworldly or whether it represents an opening to what which lies beyond the world.<sup>15</sup> Rahner can thus conclude where he began, with a seminal formulation drawn from the circumincessive character of being and knowledge. "Species" is therefore primarily an ontological and only subsequently a gnoseological concept' (*TI* i. 328).

He can then radically reconstitute the causality of grace, arguing that an uninterrupted spectrum must exist between our relationship to God *in via* and *in lumine gloriae*.

Such a new relationship of God to the creature, which cannot be brought under the category of efficient causality but only of formal causality, is on the one hand a concept which transcribes a strictly supernatural mystery; and on the other hand its possibility must not be put in doubt in virtue of purely rational considerations. It transcribes in the mode of formal ontology the concept of supernatural being in its strictly mysterious character; for all the strictly supernatural realities with which we are acquainted (the hypostatic union, the *visio beatifica* and—as we shall go on to show here—the supernatural bestowal of grace) have this in common, that in them there is expressed a relationship of God to a creature which is not one of efficient causality (a production *out* of a cause, 'ein Aus-der-Ursache-Heraus-stellen'), and which must consequently fall under the formal causality (a taking up *into* the ground [*forma*], 'ein In-den-Grund[forma]-Hineinnehmen');

<sup>14</sup> See Rahner 1968: 220 for his fuller, foundational treatment.

<sup>15</sup> Rahner claims the assertion is properly Thomistic. It is also, without doubt, a fundamental proposition for Heidegger, his erstwhile teacher.

the ontological principle of the subsistence of a finite nature in the one case, the ontological principle of a finite knowledge in the other. (*TI*i. 329–30)

Several remarks are in order here, both to prevent a misconstrual of Rahner's position and to indicate its possibilities for further development. First, Rahner is, perhaps reluctantly, trying to distinguish two aspects of grace: grace in itself and grace as it is experienced by us. There is good reason to reconfigure that distinction, but understanding its entrance into the discussion is necessary before that can occur.

We have examined how the transfer into Greek metaphysics of the primordial Christian event that was grace demanded the language game of nature and supernature. When the operative picture of the supernatural became that of a distinct, occult realm standing above the world of nature, it seemed imperative to insist that grace could not be experienced by humans. How can inner-worldly creatures *experience* that which, by definition, stands outside the world?

There are advantages in this move, especially in the world of the Middle Ages, with its seers, mystics, and charlatans, each of whom, authentic or not, posed a possible challenge to the Church's self-understanding as the mediator of grace.<sup>16</sup> If grace is linked directly to human experience, how could anyone claim that another person's experience of the divine is not authentic? Or further, that one such human experience, individual or collective, is *more* foundational than another?

There is a second reason for wanting to insist that grace not be linked directly to experience, or, at the very least, that it be considered as transcendent to human experience. The language game that is grace acts to preserve the very transcendence of God. We speak of receiving a grace, meaning that God has been active on our behalf. It can be said that we make grace a linguistic surrogate for God. Thus, 'I have received a grace,' not, 'I have received God.' The language

<sup>16</sup> What has changed between the medieval world and our own is not the absence of such putative, direct experiences of grace but rather the Church's complete inability to challenge effectively their legitimacy. In the medieval world, the individual claiming to be the direct recipient of grace would have had to explain his or her experience in relation to the Church's claim to be *mediatrix sola gratiae*. The contemporary situation is virtually inverted. The Church finds her self-understanding, that of being the preeminent channel of grace, in need of explication and defense vis-à-vis those who presume upon unmediated contact with God.



game of grace is a way of asserting union, or contact, between God and the world without surrendering God's transcendence *en face* the world. We employ the word 'grace' to suggest true experience of God without suggesting exhaustive possession of God.

This would seem to be the import of Aquinas's insistence that no one can know whether or not he has sanctifying grace (*ST* II–I q.112 a.5), a teaching that was solemnly ratified by the Council of Trent with its declaration that 'no one can know with the certitude of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained God's grace' (DS 1534; ND 1936). Suggesting that when we speak of grace, we always reference a noetic event, an event ordered toward knowledge, does not repudiate these affirmations. Again, the word 'grace' can only be understood with an epistemology that rejects the view of knowledge as 'object-acquisition'.

If grace is an interpersonal noetic event, a real encounter with another, one can never assert a noetic *apprehension*, here meaning a complete grasp of the other. The other remains as an *other*, a transcendent source of communication whom communion does not exhaust.

The other as other is as much of an irreducible pole of language as the self. Indeed, language could not exist without the other. In rejecting the possibility of a private language, Wittgenstein highlighted both the communion that occurs within the knowledge that we call language and the irreducible nature of its twin poles, interlocutors. The other remains unknown but not because of a foreign interiority that language cannot capture. Among humans, there is no such Cartesian *terra incognita*, inaccessible to language. The interior of another is as thoroughly linguistic as my own. But just as I constitute myself through a linguistic exertion that does not exhaust the self, so too does the other, hence his or her irreducible metaphysical role as one who wields language, who stands at the end of a world wielded by language. To say that I know I have communed with another is itself a language game that only occurs within language. Hence to assert knowledge of another is a linguistic paradox. It only occurs in language, but if the knowledge were truly exhaustive, language would cease because a transcendent interlocutor would no longer be present. I would simply be cataloguing the world before me.

Hence to assert that one has perceived God in the language that is the world, the metaphysical meaning of grace, is both true perception and utterly unrealizable knowledge. Something is truly given; something remains ineluctably elusive.

The great disadvantage of the nature/supernature language game is the subversion of the biblical notion that grace is the apperception of being *addressed* or favored by God. Ironically, grace, which had begun its life as the assessment of an experience, a *perception* of God's activity, was made by medieval theologians to stand necessarily above human experience.<sup>17</sup> Rahner draws out the negative implications of this approach in his essay 'Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace'.

There is no difficulty in seeing that it is problematic and dangerous from a religious point of view: if man, just so far as he experiences himself existentially by himself, is really nothing but pure nature, he is always in danger of understanding himself merely as a nature and of behaving accordingly. And then he will find God's call to him out of this human plane merely a disturbance, which is trying to force something upon him (however elevated this may be in itself) for which he is not made (on this view he is only made and destined for it *after* he has received grace, and then only in a way entirely abstracted from experience). This is particularly true since this offer of inwardly elevating grace remains *ex supposito* outside or above his real experience, and only becomes known in a faith which knows of its object *ex auditu* alone. (TI i. 300)

It seems only logical to insist that grace must be spiritual; the difficulty lies in equating spiritual with 'unworldly'. The medieval synthesis seemed to demand that grace could not be something we could know through direct experience. Otherworldly in the fullest possible sense, it was an invisible reality, attested to by the tradition and accepted on faith. That seems a foregone conclusion when grace is envisioned as an object. It must be occult.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that Trent's *Decree on Justification*, chapter XVI, does teach that knowledge of whether or not one has been definitely justified by grace is unknowable, though it is interesting that even here, the Council directs the believer's attention to the predilection of God that has been manifested in Jesus Christ: '[A] Christian should never rely on oneself or glory in oneself instead of in the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 31; 2 Cor. 10: 17), whose goodness towards all is such that he wants his own gifts to be their merits' (DS 1548; ND 1948).

Rahner acknowledged the transcendent character of grace by speaking of grace's quasi-formal causality. The term comes from Aristotelian causality and is based upon the Greek philosopher's theory of hylomorphism. All of reality is composed of matter and form, the former being ordered toward the latter, because the latter moves the former from potency to act. God is that which represents our destiny, here our teleological form. On one level of discourse, grace cannot be a consequence of efficient causality. God is not one member of the world operating upon another member. It is more akin to formal causality, which is a being taking up into the ground or form of another, and that, as Rahner points out, is how theology has characterized both the hypostatic union of Christ and the Beatific Vision that awaits humanity. Rahner will speak of quasi-formal causality to suggest that the philosophical picture of formal causality can be applied only analogously to God.<sup>18</sup> We do not simply look at the world and see God. Like the world itself, God does not come before us as one more object of knowledge, not even a transcendent form. Wittgenstein is helpful here. What we perceive is the converse of God, the world as insufficient.

Yet Rahner was a committed, spiritual son of St Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century Basque who was convinced both that he had *experienced* God's grace and that it was possible to distinguish those experiences from other, worldly ones. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* are premised upon that proposition. Challenging the notion of 'dual realms', Rahner queried, 'How am I to know that everything I in fact encounter in my existential experience of myself (the ultimate yearning, the most profound inner dispersion, the radical experience of the universally human tragedy of concupiscence and death) does

<sup>18</sup> Though Patrick Burke notes a development in Rahner's thought on the question: 'A clear continuity is apparent between Rahner's earlier writings on grace and his treatment of it in *Grundkurs (Foundations)*. Thus, in *Grundkurs*, he continues to assert grace and the beatific vision as two phases in one process of divine self-communication, creation as the presupposition for grace and the gratuity of grace and the supernatural existential. In *Grundkurs*, however, there is a development of his thought. He stresses much more than previously the existential unity of grace and nature and defines man as the "event of God's grace." He drops all reference to quasi-formal causality and stresses the operation of grace as effecting its own acceptance. Most significant, he presupposes grace as revelation and, emphasizing the priority of this grace, sees it as coming to categorical expression in any categorical experience, even if not specifically Christian or even religious' (2002: 246).

in fact fall within the realm of my “nature”, and would also exist, exist in just this form, if there were no vocation to supernatural communion with God?’ Clearly, ‘the possibility of experiencing grace and the possibility of experiencing grace *as* grace are not the same thing’ (TI i. 300).

Rahner acknowledged his debt to Ignatius by epistemologically linking grace to our prethematic grasp of the *whither*, which never becomes a conceptual object and therefore is never directly experienced, though it makes all uniquely human experience possible. Just as human knowledge is not possible without the *excessus*, so too human life cannot be understood apart from its orientation toward the life of God that is grace.<sup>19</sup>

Rahner’s option to speak of the quasi-formal causality of grace was determinative for his realignment of the medieval distinction between uncreated grace, the divine indwelling, and created grace, the effects of this indwelling upon the human person. Earlier theology, thinking in terms of efficient causality, spoke of uncreated grace as the consequence of created grace. God could come to dwell within the human person (*donum increatum*) only after having efficiently modified the accidental qualities of that person (*donum creatum*).

A crude, materialist picture immediately impinges itself when the foundational causality of grace is thought to be efficient. Physical, inner-worldly causality is efficient. One entity within the world acts upon another and thus transforms it. The problem with employing efficient causality, pictured in the form of physical causality, in relationship to God is twofold. It imperils divine transcendence, and it employs a notion of causality insufficient for contemporary epistemology. If God acts upon objects within the world in a manner akin to any other object within the world, why should God not be considered as a member of the world? Likewise, if knowing is not one entity acting upon another, but rather one entity coming to completion through engagement with that which is already *potentially* its own self, a more adequate conception of causality in the act of knowing is needed than the efficient can offer.

<sup>19</sup> See TI iv. 165–88 for Rahner’s discussion of the significance of Maréchal’s work for the question of grace, and see TI iii. 86–90 for Rahner’s moving description of the existential experience of grace.

As Rahner understands Aquinas, all knowledge *transforms* the human person, enters into the very constitution of the person. That being said, knowledge of God would never simply be another datum referenced to some occult object. It would always be a knowing that alters the very constitution of the human person. God is not known as an object in the world, and yet knowledge of God reorders all that is known of the world. And, because the world and self are circumincessive, this knowledge reorders the self. Awareness of God is thus transforming.

Rahner arrives at this conclusion via Aquinas. It is also an inevitable conclusion of philosophy after Wittgenstein. If every object of knowledge enters into a skein of affirmed realities, then every element in the skein is reordered by its entrance. Thus to know one new thing about the world is to know a fundamentally different world. This foundational feature of human knowing also helps to explain the traditional assertion that what is called 'uncreated grace', God bestowing God's self upon the person, or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is always a function of 'created grace', a real modification of the human person. The danger again lies in holding the wrong picture. One cannot picture the human person apart from the world. 'Difficulties can really only arise where one thinks that man ceases to be at the point where his skin forms a limit, and that everything is extrinsic which cannot be localized imaginatively within this sack of skin . . . ' (Rahner *TI* iv. 200). With the wrong picture, one might be tempted to say that everything changes except the self, but this would be to mistake the self as fundamentally distinct from the world. If my world has changed because I have perceived the Beloved, then I have changed.

Reviewing the impact of Maréchal's work, Rahner insisted, '[M]an's orientation, as spirit, towards God was not merely something that was "also" present in man, but that man's ordination to God, even though an implicit and *a priori* transcendental, makes him what he experiences himself to be, something that he can deny and repress only at the cost of sin, because even then it is affirmed in every act of his spiritual existence (though only as an implicitly transcendental *a priori*)' (*TI* iv. 170). In other words, openness to God is fundamental to the human way of being in the world. At the very least, Rahner's labors managed to move grace, to employ a visual

metaphor, back to serving as the ‘point of contact’ between God and the human person.<sup>20</sup>

As previously noted, Rahner himself thought that the Aristotelian system that Aquinas had employed, and which had become normative for Catholic discourse, still lacked a deeply interpersonal or relational component, at least as it had so far been taught. He was fundamentally correct, and deeply Thomistic, in insisting that grace had to have a noetic component. Where else would the human person come closer to the divine than in that transcendent knowledge that distinguishes human life from all others?<sup>21</sup> Rahner would appropriate a phrase dear to Aquinas when he defined the human person as *quoddammodo omnia*, a limited intelligence with a drive toward unlimited knowledge (*Sum. c. gen. III. 112* and frequently elsewhere). I believe that the desired personalism is there in Aquinas, and that Rahner’s contemporary Bernard Lonergan, because he shifts even more decidedly away from what he called ‘conceptualism’ in Thomistic studies, helps to bring it to the fore.

#### 4.2.5 The wrong picture of a concept

In ‘Insight Revisited’ Lonergan characterized his intellectual journey, and the spur to his masterpiece *Insight*, as an epistemological shift from conceptual formulations to the *act of insight* itself which produces them and which, by its own ineluctable dynamism, also always subverts them. He wrote that, as a student, ‘I was quite interested in philosophy, but also extremely critical of the key position accorded universal concepts. I thought of myself as a nominalist’ (Lonergan

<sup>20</sup> Haight notes (1979: 121): ‘This ontologically grounded principle of simultaneous identity or unity and distinction and diversity (plurality) runs all through Rahner’s theology and is particularly operative in his theology of grace. For the human spirit in its transcendence is a “potency” for receiving the supernatural, grace, God’s self-gift. And grace is related as form or act to a person’s transcendence, which is “matter” or an active potency to receive it.’

<sup>21</sup> A very clear statement of which occurs in Pius XII’s encyclical letter *Mystici corporis* (1943): ‘The Divine Persons are said to indwell inasmuch as, being present in a mysterious way to living intellectual creatures, they are attained by these through knowledge and love, but in a manner which transcends all nature and is quite intimate and unique’ (DS 3815; ND1997).

1974: 263).<sup>22</sup> Tracing his intellectual development through his student days to those of his teaching, he suggests that the key to his articles on ‘understanding and the inner word’ in Aquinas was that the saint ‘attributed the key role in cognitional theory not to inner words, concepts, but to acts of understanding’ (Lonergan 1974: 267).<sup>23</sup>

Lonergan’s labors were to make prominent the active element in human intelligence that allows us to perceive forms. Where he differs from both Rahner and Aquinas is in his willingness to surrender the Aristotelian notion, or at least its misleading spatial–temporal picture, that form must somehow adhere to matter.<sup>24</sup> Form is not a cookie cutter that pounds its way through matter. The problem with that picture is a categorical one. The form itself is being viewed as something quasi-material. Form is rather the active engagement of the intellect with the content of its knowledge (Lonergan 1967: 25). Lonergan insists that insight, the perception of form, is not intuition. It need not claim an ontological status *independent* of the knower, but is always a provisional appropriation of being. Adverting to the previous discussion of formal causality, one might say that the perception of a form is the direct consequence of being drawn into the world teleologically.

Like Rahner, Lonergan also sees himself as affirming Thomistic anthropology. The human person is *quoaddammodo omnia*, that unique spot in the cosmos which is ordered toward knowledge of all that is. The twist, which is clear in the following account from *Insight*, is that being, the object of human striving, is defined in relationship to the act of knowing. The picture being employed has

<sup>22</sup> The articles were entitled ‘The Concept of *Verbum* in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas’, *Theological Studies*, 7 (1946), 349–92; 8 (1947), 35–79, 404–44; 10 (1949), 3–40, 359–93. They were later published in book form: *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. David Burrell (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press 1967).

<sup>23</sup> Anti-conceptualism remained a major thrust of Lonergan’s later works. Cf. Lonergan 1967: 185–8, 211–13.

<sup>24</sup> Perhaps it would be fairer to say, where he is more *explicitly* distinct from Rahner’s reading of Aquinas, since Rahner’s position, when carefully read, is similar. Cf. for example Rahner 1968: 171–2. ‘Thus Thomas says, for example “*esse* belongs properly to that which has *esse* and is subsistent in its *esse*. But forms and other things like them are not called beings as though they themselves exist (as though they had their own in-itself of themselves), but because something exists through them.”’ Cf. also 215, 218, 250 and *De ver.* q. 10 a. 8 ad 10.

changed. Being is not a vast collection of objects, each corresponding to a cluster of concepts. Indeed, concepts remain provisional in the human drive toward being:

Being has been defined, not as the objective of formulated questions, but as the objective of the pure desire to know. Just as that desire is prior to any answer and it itself is not the answer, so too it is prior to any formulated question and it itself is not a formulation. Moreover, just as the pure desire is the intelligent and rational basis from which we discern between correct and incorrect answers, so also it is the intelligent and rational basis from which we discern between valid and mistaken questions. In brief, the pure desire to know, whose objective is being, is the source not only of answers but also of their criteria, and not only of questions but also of the grounds on which they are screened. For it is intelligent inquiry and reasonable reflection that just as much yield the right questions as the right answers. (1958: 351–2)

For Lonergan concepts are temporally bound. What both creates and dismisses them is the unlimited desire to know.

At this point, it should be obvious that what I have been calling the world, following Wittgenstein, was designated by the Transcendental Thomists as Being.<sup>25</sup> Given the widely divergent language games which ceaselessly swirl around that word, some explicating wading into the eddies would be helpful. The word itself seems to draw language games toward it, which alone ought to say something about its existential role in language. Even if there is no way to define the meaning of the word, some attempt must be made to exclude misleading interpretations.

Heidegger begins *Being and Time* with the laconic assertion, at least as laconic as Heidegger gets, ‘Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of *Being* and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being’ (1962: 1). And he ends the entire opus with the questions: ‘Is there a way which leads from primordial time to the meaning of *Being*? Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of *Being*? (488)? In other words, *Being* is that which, whatsoever which, is to be pursued by

<sup>25</sup> Rahner 1968: 208–9: ‘We know already what *esse* means in Thomas: the one full ground of all possible objects of knowledge as the index of the absolutely unlimited scope of the pre-apprehension.’



human beings in their self-constituting usage of time. In all cases, what is being referenced is not some thing, but the fundamental ability of the human person to engage all things.<sup>26</sup> ‘Hence’, writes Heidegger, ‘Being, as that which is asked about, must be exhibited in a way of its own, essentially different from the way in which entities are discovered. Accordingly, *what is to be found out by the asking*—the meaning of Being—also demands that it be conceived in a way of its own, essentially **contrasting with the concepts** in which entities acquire their determinate signification’ (1962: 26; italics his; boldface mine).

No Thomist put this better than Pierre Rousselot, the brilliant young French Jesuit of the early twentieth century who rejected what he considered the excessive conceptualism in Thomistic studies, as though the chief accomplishment of Aquinas were the necessarily time-bound concepts that his thinking produced.<sup>27</sup> He insisted that the enduring strength of Thomism lay in its ‘intellectualism’, which he defined as ‘the faculty of being’, that which drives the human toward all that is.

Many who consider themselves to be faithful Thomists nonetheless read Aquinas through the post-Cartesian centuries intervening. When they hear talk of ‘intellectualism’, it sounds in their ears with an antirealist ring. Their immediate concern is that Thomas is being made into an idealist! Yet, as Rousselot so eloquently insisted, Thomas never allowed Being and Knowledge to be sundered. The saint is not trying to traverse the Kantian gap; he is simply reveling in the circumincessive union of knowledge and Being that he sees as characteristic of God, and of the human person by virtue of participation.

It is only when we are in the presence of that Intelligence ‘which is identically its own act,’ however, that we possess the measure and ideal of all knowledge. The whole critique of knowledge finds its ultimate explanation in the theory of the divine knowledge. The decreasing perfections we discover in intuition, concept, judgment and reasoning must be computed in terms of the

<sup>26</sup> As Burrell notes, ‘“being” (or “exists”) cannot be interpreted as spatiotemporal location without eliminating most of the established grammar of our talk about thoughts and intentional activity generally’ (1973: 255).

<sup>27</sup> Pierre Rousselot SJ (1878–1915), tragically killed while serving as a French chaplain during the First World War. He produced two Sorbonne doctoral dissertations, published under the titles *Intellectualism de saint Thomas* and *Pour l’histoire du problème de l’amour au moyen âge*.

disparity that is seen to exist between them and the unique simplicity of knowledge to be found in God. (Rousselot 1935: 222)

In *The Intellectualism of Saint Thomas* Rousselot brilliantly characterized human knowledge as 'the faculty of other-ness'. It is the self present to the world, present in the world.

Contrary to the popular idea of today, which regards the intellectual process as an 'epiphenomenon' on the surface of true 'life,' St. Thomas looks upon it as the life-process *par excellence*, and sees in it the deepest and most intense activity of intellectual beings. In opposition to those who see in intellect something necessarily egocentric, he makes of it the faculty which emancipates men from mere subjectivity; it may aptly be called 'the faculty of other-ness' if we may employ the term. In a wider sense it is for him, as has been well said, the 'faculty of being,' the faculty which most truly grasps, and attains, and holds being. It unites in the highest degree subjective intensity and objective extension, because if it grasps reality it does so by *becoming* reality in a certain manner: and in that precisely consists its nature. (1935: 20)

As Lonergan noted in *Insight*, his transposition of the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge into the twentieth century, one must first jettison the wrong picture of what it means to know. Knowledge is dynamic, the work of an engaged knower who is actively seeking rather than passively apprehending:

[O]ne had better not begin with the assumption that knowing is 'something there to be looked at and described.' For knowing is an organically integrated activity: on a flow of sensitive experiences, inquiry intelligently generates a cumulative succession of insights, and the significance of the experiences varies concomitantly with the cumulation of insights; in memory's store of experiences and in the formulation of accumulated insights, reflection grasps approximations towards the virtually unconditioned and attainments of it to issue into probable and certain judgments of fact. To conceive knowing one must understand the dynamic pattern of experiencing, inquiring, reflecting, and such understanding is not to be reached by taking a look. (1958: 415–16; cf. Lonergan 1967: 105–6)

Human noesis rests upon a fundamentally human drive toward that which is, toward that which stands outside the self, 'the virtually unconditioned', which is why Lonergan will trenchantly redefine the medieval word 'Being' in the most modern of ways: 'Being, then, is the objective of the pure desire to know' (1958: 348).

In considering the Thomistic insistence that *ens et verum convertuntur*, Lonergan takes up the triad of medieval Transcendentals, giving primacy to *verum*.<sup>28</sup> He is quite correct, given his explicit starting point in *Insight*, which is that proportionate Being is the object of human thought.

[T]he series of attributes we have found in the unrestricted act of understanding reveal the identity of our conception with Aquinas' conception of God as *ipsum intelligere*, *ipsum esse*, *summum bonum*, the exemplar, efficient cause, first agent, and last end of all else that is or could be. Among Thomists, however, there is a dispute whether *ipsum intelligere* or *ipsum esse subsistens* is logically first among divine attributes. As has been seen in the section on the notion of God, all other divine attributes follow from the notion of an unrestricted act of understanding. Moreover, since we define being by its relation to intelligence, necessarily our ultimate is not being but intelligence. (1958: 677)

Creatures of the word, we can only approach the *ens* through the *verum*. If Metz is correct in seeing Aquinas as inaugurating a fundamental shift from cosmology to anthropology, it is because, under the impulse of the gospel, he has sublated the Greek world-as-nature with our contemporary world-as-history.<sup>29</sup> Consequently our experience of God must necessarily be historical, in the arena, and under the aegis, of the word. Imbued with the metaphysics of Exodus, Aquinas *expects* Being to speak, to reveal itself.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See Aertsen 1996 for a detailed discussion of the Transcendentals in the thought of Thomas. At 80 he writes, 'But what is the first conception of the human intellect, the end term of the resolution? . . . *De ver.* 1.1 provides the answer: "That which the intellect first conceives, as best known, and into which it resolves all its conceptions, is being (*ens*), as Avicenna says in the beginning of his *Metaphysics*" (*De ver.* 1. 1).'

But the question of primacy obfuscates the fundamental circumincessive nature of Being and knowledge in Thomas. One exists for the other. So Aertsen continues, 'From the thesis that being is the first conception, Thomas draws the conclusion that being is the proper object of the intellect, and is thus the *primum intelligibile*, just as sound is the *primum audibile* (*ST I*, 5.2).' Further, 'Being is that on the basis of which things are capable of being known by an intellect, it is the prerequisite condition for every intelligible object, for something is intelligible insofar as it has being. That being is the first known is for Thomas at the same time a fundamental statement on the relation between man and reality.'

<sup>29</sup> See Aertsen 1996: 257–8 for a perceptive critique of Metz's position.

<sup>30</sup> Burrell (1986: 29–30) insists quite insightfully that for Aquinas *esse* bears 'an intelligibility with respect to essence analogous to that which form conveys to matter'. I take that to mean that if form for Aquinas is what intelligence draws

On a related matter, the question increasingly posed in Thomistic studies is whether or not Thomas's *Quinque viae* should be understood as an attempt to prove the necessary existence of a God who makes possible the Greek world of nature, in which case their utility is surely both time-bound and an inorganic intrusion into the Greek cosmos. Or should they rather be viewed as a Christian, contemplative rumination upon the 'natural' features of reality, which, under the impulse of the gospel, now appear to be graced, which is another way of saying dialogical, or revelatory.<sup>31</sup> In other words, Thomas is looking at nature and seeing history, the former being understood as stasis, the latter as the drama of dialogue. The world itself is speaking to Thomas.

forth from matter, then the very concept of existence—why there is something rather than nothing—is equally what intelligence ought to draw forth from consideration of the world of existents.

<sup>31</sup> For the state of the question see 'Ways of Reading the Five Ways' in Kerr 2002: 52–72. See also Burrell 1979: 7–8. Recent discussion of the question is reviewed throughout Stout and MacSwain 2004.

# 5

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## Grace as Gaze

### 5.1 SEEING SIGNS

We have examined only one element, that of the world, in the simple assertion that 'grace is the apperception of being addressed by the world'. Having considered the human being's relationship to the world, the noetic character of this unique *apperception* must still be examined. The task at hand is to make the Christian experience of grace comprehensible to those outside of Christian discourse.<sup>1</sup> Following Lonergan in understanding form not as an inherent structure of reality apart from human knowing but as a necessarily human way of knowing, does it help to think of grace as the perception of a form, in this case, as a form that is understood to be a sign, which is to say, that the act of insight that produces the form is itself seen as the gracious gift of another, as a real apprehension of the other in the form of a sign?

In a post-linguistic metaphysics of epistemology, acknowledging the form to be a sign serves the same function as Rahner's quasi-formal causality. It recognizes God's transcendence, all the while insisting that a real, determinative (and hence ontological) relation exists. The deity does not enter human knowledge as an object of cognition. That which is the foundation of human knowledge cannot become yet another object of knowledge. Yet a real knowledge of

<sup>1</sup> Of course it is now a matter of conciliar teaching that no one stands completely outside the Christ event and therefore disengaged from the reality that is grace. Yet even while affirming this, there certainly are contemporaries who see no reason to enter into Christian discourse (which ultimately means to enter the Christian world), because they do not comprehend the meaningfulness of that discourse, its purposefulness in human life. This is the issue at hand.

God's presence within the world exists. God has willed to reveal Godself within the world, and that self is nothing more, or less, than utter graciousness.

A sign can be distinguished from that which it signifies. It could not otherwise be called a sign. At the same time, it remains the luminous manifestation of the signifier within the world. Remember that the world is itself nothing less than the sum of all signs, the communion of all signifiers, recalling the earlier assertion that all elements within the world speak, can be brought into language, and hence are ordered toward knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In this case, the form so perceived as a sign demands an existential response. This 'form' is not simply a handle for our interaction with what is, but the perception of a gaze, which, by its interpersonal nature, necessarily evokes a response.

Of course, that's close, *mutatis mutandi*, to the definition of grace that Thomas offered. If the thirteenth-century version stands, why tamper with it? First, because calling grace the formal modification of accidents is incomprehensible to the vast majority of people who no longer discourse in Aristotelian categories, and it appears somewhat trivialized to those within the Church who employ, consciously or not, only the remnants of the Aristotelian system.

Secondly, one should note that the definition of grace offered here is rooted in Transcendental Thomism. It speaks of the *perception* of a form. Thomas's definition of grace speaks of form, independent of the human act of perception. When speaking of the nexus between the divine and the human, adding an adjective such as 'perceived' is not without consequences. Here the goal will be to highlight the characteristically human reception of grace, without denigrating its divine identity. The former is needed to make grace comprehensible. If the latter is lost, grace need not be comprehensible, because, as Rahner warned, it would then be merely superfluous.

<sup>2</sup> Rahner would, of course, use the term 'real symbol' here, rather than sign, and, given the distinctions often made in philosophical discourse between a symbol and a sign, symbol may well be the more appropriate word. I retain 'sign' here because it emphasizes the personalist agency involved in the act of perception and thus manifests God's activity in the world. God is never passively perceived by us. Rather, as the Greek verbs used in the accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances attest, the divine actively manifests itself. No knowledge of God's own self would be possible without God's willing it.

And yet, in the post-modern world, when the perception of form is considered the birthing of reality itself, Thomas's definition may yet recover some of its poignancy. After Wittgenstein the meaning of any word is its usage, and that usage is always determined by the purpose at hand. Platonic essences don't stand behind words; slowly shifting noetic forms, intimately related to the human project, do. Rahner insisted that grace must be the point of contact between the divine and the human. It cannot be reduced to the human, but it likewise cannot be understood as standing completely apart from it. Lonergan saw form as something akin to an elusive trace for human intelligence. Something quite tangible has been found, as tangible as human knowledge gets, but the true object of the search remains elusive. Can one recover the core of Thomas's thought on grace by calling it the apperception of a communicative form?

## 5.2 REVELATION AND GRACE

One begins by reaffirming that revelation, apart from which grace has no meaning, is itself always an apperception of favor.<sup>3</sup> Like so many words employed by Christians, its meaning fundamentally shifts with the direction of the gaze. Revelation is an act of God, and therefore the logic employed in the language game of a divine/human dyad necessarily gives priority to the divine action. However, no human being encounters revelation *as an act of God*. We don't stand on that side of the relationship. We encounter it as a complex of signs, and *perceive* it to be an act of God, something coming from without the world and addressed to the world.<sup>4</sup> Having once entered into the

<sup>3</sup> One raises a good, but untimely, question in asking if I am here excluding those outside of revelation from participation in grace. The salient issue here is that grace only enters discourse because of revelation, and it must therefore first find its meaning in relation to revelation. Only thus established can one begin to ask about its relationship to those who stand apart from the revelation in question.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps an example helps to illustrate the distinction. If I write a letter that someone else reads, he or she has certainly encountered an act of communication. They are not, however, participants in the *act of writing* the letter. Of course, if one understands the import of Wittgenstein's work, one would want to distinguish three acts: that of writing a letter, that of reading such a letter, and the *act of communication* that is the composite of the two. So, for example, in §454 of the *Investigations*,

world, in faith-discourse, when we speak of revelation, we give priority to God's action, affirming revelation to be a divine act before it is anything else. Epistemologically, however, the priority lies with the human act of perception. Even when we acknowledge a given revelation to be the very presence of God among us, and offer it, to the best of our ability, the reverence and submission that such a presence demands, that human act of acknowledgement, follows, and does not precede, the human act of perception.

This distinction, between the human act of perception and God's activity, helps to illumine and justify the traditional usage of the term 'actual grace'. All actual grace, grace effective, is grace perceived, or at least it is grace ordered toward perception. What makes the grace actual is its entrance into human cognition. Without such an entry, no response could be given to grace. Brusquely put, the *place* of grace is knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Yet in distinguishing actual grace from uncreated grace, Christianity also affirms that God's activity, even within the world, cannot be limited by the human act of perception. It makes sense to speak of God as gracious beyond any act of human apprehension, an assertion that will come into its own in the concluding considerations of the Trinitarian implications of grace.

If grace is the point of contact between humanity and God, we have no alternative but to arrive at that point of contact via our own humanity. To think that we stand on the other side of the divide muddles human reflection upon the reality in question and endangers the very transcendence of God. Ironically, this is the danger

Wittgenstein writes (132e): 'How does it come about that this arrow → *points*? Doesn't it seem to carry in it something beside itself?—"No, not the dead line on paper; only the psychical thing, the meaning, can do that."—That is both true and false. The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it.'

<sup>5</sup> We have already seen that 'grace is perceptible' is an affirmation that Luther, Ignatius of Loyola, and Rahner share, as well as the reasons that some Christians would offer in opposition. Lonergan also argues that grace is knowable because it occurs within the active intellect, the intellect in what he calls 'second act', distinguishing it from the mere potential to know, which the early Lonergan called 'first act'. 'It is difficult to admit that a quality *per se* unknowable to us except by divine revelation is present in second acts elicited in intellective potencies: what is present in a second act in the intellect is some act of knowing; what is present in a second act of the will is some act of willing; but acts of knowing and willing are by their very nature knowable and known to the one who is knowing and willing' (Lonergan 1946; Stebbins's translation).



inherent in some interpretations of Karl Barth's approach to revelation. Barth wants to emphasize the absolute transcendence of God's word. It bears no analogical relationship to the world. However, if one considers revelation to be an absolute *alienum*, upon what basis does the human person *acknowledge* this revelation to be an act of God, one which would require the response of faith? For Wittgenstein, all knowledge is radically intersystemic because all knowledge is linguistic. It never emerges from the skein of language.

Religious fundamentalism surreptitiously places the recipient in the very mind of God, simply declaring that a given text *is* God's word. What has been ignored is the very human apperception that one has encountered the grace that *is* revelation. The fundamentalist chides others for not responding to God's word, all the while refusing to acknowledge that this word did not plummet into the world, independent of human knowledge. A human act of apperception, albeit itself one acknowledged to be a grace, and thus freely bestowed, nevertheless precedes acknowledgement. While the act of apperception acknowledges divine gratuity, it is not gratuitous to insist that a profoundly *human* act has occurred.

For the religions of revelation, revelation itself is the first grace, because it literally reveals God and humanity as coming into contact. Coming into contact demands that: (1) the words 'God' and 'humanity' are not interchangeable, because they represent distinct realities; (2) these two realities are ordered, one toward the other; and (3) these two realities have met in a way that does not obliterate the distinction between the two.

Therefore the very meaning of grace is inextricably linked to revelation, because without revelation, which is the point of contact between God and humanity, there is no contact. In other words, grace has no meaning outside the language game of revelation; at the very least, not the meaning it has within that system. Systems in which God and humanity collapse into one another, where the words 'God' and 'humanity' are ultimately interchangeable, do not have a revelation, a point of contact establishing both union and distinction.

If grace is fundamentally linked to revelation, it becomes clearer why grace should not be considered apart from its noetic function. Grace unrevealed is not grace. It simply has no meaning (because it

has no place within the world). Remember that the world in which humans dwell is formed by language. Grace thus enters the world, takes its place among its elements, reordering them as it does so, because grace, which is, noetically speaking, revelation, enters into language.

Examine what might appear to be an objection. Don't believers often speak of God working 'silently' on their behalf, for example, over the course of many years? Hasn't grace been present, though unperceived? Quite simply, no. We have here what Wittgenstein would call language taking a holiday. An engine is idling, not doing its work (1967: 51e; §132). If a person were suddenly to realize that, say, for the last ten years, her life has been amiss, she might very well (and correctly!) assert that God has been active on her behalf these past ten years. But it muddles language to speak of grace as having been present but ignored these past ten years. Grace wasn't present until she perceived God's activity, because grace is *an act of communication*. It is not a question of making God's action dependent upon human perception. It is simply a question of keeping the language game within bounds, by recognizing that we use the term 'grace' when perception of the divine has occurred.<sup>6</sup>

One can delineate the rules of the Christian language game that is grace by remembering the gospel. If grace means only that the divine exists and does its 'divine work', then the gospel itself is rendered superfluous. God always exists as activity. If one asserts no more than that, the Christian understanding of the deity advances no further than that of the ancients. The novelty of the gospel is that it calls us to respond to God's action. Its 'good news' is of the sort found in an invitation, not a headline.

<sup>6</sup> This doesn't preclude the Christian assertion that God is always offering his grace, though we often fail to respond to it. For Christians, God simply *is* a revealing God. In this sense God is always revealing, though revelation *occurs* when a human perceives and responds. The language game of revelation requires two poles, someone signing and another receiving the sign, which is why one would have to assert that a sign fashioned by some human being, buried under centuries of detritus, does not reveal anything, though it may well have the potential to do so.

This is not to assert that God possesses only a potential to reveal, which is actualized by interaction with humanity. As will be shown, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity insists that God's revelatory nature is not dependent upon interaction with us.

God is pure activity, but note the implausibility of reducing grace to divine activity. One is forced to speak of those things that God is *doing* even now, apart from any human act of perception. But what does it *mean* to say that God is at work *for* the world, *outside* of the world? There is *something* the Christian wants to affirm here. That ‘something’ is the Thomistic understanding of God as pure activity and the orientation of the world toward this activity, but one must be very careful not to transfer putative, future acts of perception into the divine realm. To say that God is, even now, at work on a grace that I will receive tomorrow is to muddle the divine realm with the human, spatial-temporal world. One thinks that there is a certain spatio-temporal infinity within the world that must be transferred, or based, within the infinity of God. However, it is the infinity of language, not of things or actions, which is here in question. God is not something akin to Santa’s workshop, busily preparing future graces, any more than God is the ultimate depository of the meaning of  $\pi$ .<sup>7</sup>

If ‘God as activity’ were the sum of Christianity’s insight, then God becomes an agent akin to nature, and no one needs to bend the knee to thank nature.<sup>8</sup> No one must ask what nature wants of us to have acted so graciously on our behalf. If human appropriation of God’s activity is not necessary, we have entered a religious system far removed from that of revelation.

<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein noted that even when language appears ‘transcendent’, this is only a function of the language game being employed. Infinity is not thereby brought into language. For example, we do not gaze upon infinity when we realize that a new fraction can be introduced between any two existing ones. It’s in the nature of the game itself (Wittgenstein 1978: 137, s. II § 42). Or ‘To say that a technique is unlimited does *not* mean that it goes on without ever stopping—that it increases immeasurably; but that it lacks the institution of the end, that it is not finished off if it has no period. Or of a playing-field that is unlimited, when the rules of the game do not prescribe any boundaries—say by means of a line’ (ibid. 138, s. II § 45). Or ‘As when we say “this theorem holds all numbers” and think that in our thoughts we have comprehended all numbers like apples in a box’ (Wittgenstein 1974: 263). The notion of transcendence being presented here is in no way one of an apparent ‘infinity of magnitude’ to human thought, a notion already debunked in Kant. In other words, whatever may eventually be discovered of  $\pi$ , it will not be God!

<sup>8</sup> It’s interesting to note that the English language game of ‘Mother Nature’ conflates the Greek understanding of nature with the Christian insistence upon a divine personalism, though here the personalism is typically flaccid. It is only with the advent of environmentalism that Mother Nature has begun to have expectations of us.

## 5.3 HISTORY, NATURE, AND GRACE

The grace of revelation is the apperception of the world's meaning. It is the recognition that another, not of the world, is speaking. Such a simple sentence requires explication. First, the grace of revelation presupposes what was earlier called the grace of Being, that is, it presupposes a gratuitous world. The world itself is the prethematic totality in which the human person dwells. A world, not chaos, exists, and this allows the apperception of meaning itself. Note, therefore, that even the 'grace of Being' is not devoid of election, call, and response. If I fail to perceive the world as wonderful, as wonderfully purposeful, in short, as graced, then a fundamental grace, an opportunity for engagement, has been lost.

The grace of revelation is to perceive the world itself, the totality into which I have been thrown, as an interlocutor. The verb *perceive* requires emphasis. Someone who experiences the grace of revelation perceives an element, or nexus of them, within the world to be speaking for the totality that is the world. Could the perception be in error? Within faith, no, but it is very important to realize that 'outside faith' it could. It is possible to take the earlier option and view the world as meaningless or illusory. If faith were *compelled* to assign meaning to the world, gratuity would be lost and one would never know if the 'compulsion' in question were anything more than an imposition of the mind, but the believer, in discerning signs that the world is meaningful, in the same act of discernment, perceives that this need not be the case, that the apperception of meaning is itself an act of favor, a graciousness coming to the self from outside the self. Just as the grace of Being is the insight that nothing need exist, the grace of revelation is the insight that nothing need be meaningful.

Nature is not the stage of history, as it is in Greek thought. Nor is history the illusion that burns away when one confronts nature itself as eternal, as in Hindu thought. In the revealed religions, nature is sublated by history, and history becomes an act of dialogue.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Though to be fair to Eastern thought, or at the very least to indicate the potential for dialogue between the worldviews, one must ask about the similarity in the language games which each employs. As Wittgenstein pointed out in his discussion of solipsism, when the self and the world are coterminous, one can *seemingly* dismiss

The apperception of favor is a uniquely interpersonal *event*, that which occurs within history, not nature. In the ordinary usage of the word, there are no events within nature. One doesn't speak of the event of leaves falling, or the event of spring's approach, or even the event of cancerous cells forming, though in the latter case it is quite significant that we do speak of the event of one's *learning* that cancerous cells are forming within his own body, or of that of someone he loves. Involve, and thus invoke, human agency, and one stands before an event. We normally reserve the word 'event' for occurrences that are noteworthy precisely because they are not bound by empirically affirmed, if not verified, laws of cause and effect.<sup>10</sup> Events occur within history, within the domain of human freedom. On the rare occasions that we do speak of an event of nature, i.e., the eruption of a volcano, a hurricane, or an earthquake, it is precisely because these seem to defy the now-presumed-upon predictability of nature. They either act with an agency apparently so capricious that one is tempted to assign intention to it, at least metaphorically, or they act upon such a scale that a human response is imperative.

To feel that the world requires a response is only possible in a world of history, not a world of nature. We employ the word 'grace' when we perceive the world itself to be speaking, to be addressing us about its ultimate disposition. Grace is an apperception that is world-embracing. It is only possible if, and when, humans ask about the *whole* and not the part, even though it is some charmed part that elicits the question about the whole, one of those parts that together compose the world. 'They make themselves manifest.'

When the world-speaking character of grace is elided, the stage is set for seemingly endless disagreements about the supernatural

one or the other, and all of the elements in the game remain in place (cf. Monk 1990: 259–60). In like manner, when the West speaks of God as radically other, it pushes alterity into nothingness and eventually back into sameness. How different is that from the Eastern Absolute? Then the salient question for both systems is existential dynamism, and even there the question worth exploration is to what extent nuptials and negativity might mean the same.

<sup>10</sup> With the elipsis 'if not verified' I simply want to grant Hume's assertion that no amount of empirical evidence can verify, strictly speaking, the postulates of cause and effect. Of course, readers of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (1969) know that human beings do *affirm* these laws in their ways of life.

character of grace and the natural character of the world. The salient point for the religions of revelation is that neither can be itself without the other. Something other than the world must address the world, and that can only be done by entering the world, by entering language. In the terms set by these debates one can, of course, be faithful or unfaithful to the Christian message, illustrative and obfuscating about its significance. The problem is that when grace even begins to sound like an object, its unique quality as grace has been lost.

#### 5.4 THE NOETIC CHARACTER OF GRACE

One such quality lost is grace's noetic and interpersonal character. Here it is helpful to reexamine what John Henry Newman termed 'the illative sense' in his nineteenth-century classic *The Grammar of Ascent* [1870] (1979). 'Illative' is derived from *illatus*, the past participle of the Latin verb *inferre* (to bring in, or infer). Newman was trying to show 'how we gain an image of God and give a real assent to the proposition that he exists' (1979: 97). With some prescience, he argued that human knowledge never functions according to the epistemological schematic imposed upon it by the empirical sciences. Human beings grant certainty to all manner of facts without subjecting them to empirical investigations. For example, the human project would come to a standstill if everyone declined to accept upon belief that Great Britain is an island. Of course one could do the empirical footwork, but that is not what actually happens. We normally presume that communal knowledge is in order as it stands, and act accordingly.

Newman employs examples strikingly similar to Wittgenstein in his notes *On Certainty*. For example, I cannot prove that I had a yesterday. All that I can show to someone who might suggest otherwise is that all my currently received perceptions reinforce the affirmation that I did. This congruence of perceived facts leading to an existential affirmation is what Newman called the illative sense, and he himself noted that this sense will vary with individuals, according to their starting point within an existentially affirmed world. What

does not vary, however, is the necessity of interpreting the world and of giving fundamental human assent to that act of interpretation.

Newman insisted that '[I]t seems clear that methodical processes of inference, useful as they are, as far as they go, are only instruments of the mind, and need, in order to their due exercise, that real ratiocination and present imagination, which gives them a sense beyond their letter, and which, while acting through them, reaches to conclusions beyond and above them. Such a living *organon* is a personal gift, and not a mere method or calculus' (1979: 250).

All this being said, a person who perceives the world to be speaking, and acts accordingly, has performed a noetic act that is not reducible to the canons of empiricism, but neither is it, strictly speaking, in contradiction to them. One would want to say that it is larger than them, since it is one of the many epistemological and existential acts of confidence that collectively form the world in which we dwell. Newman suggested that the illative sense, when applied to the question of God, 'interprets what it sees around it by this previous inward teaching (of conscience), as the true key of that maze of vast complicated disorder; and thus it gains a more and more consistent and luminous vision of God from the most unpromising materials' (1979: 106).

When grace occurs, what Newman called the illative sense is operative. Faith, which is both the response and the prerequisite to revelation, perceives elements within the world to be signs that are being used to address the person. In other words, 'eyes of faith', to borrow a term and a title from Rousselot, see a pattern, a form bringing the many into the synthetic unity of the one, a form which is quite real to the perceiver, though not necessarily apparent to another. Kierkegaard speaks of 'a form that appears to the inner eye of the soul', which conditions one's understanding of the eternal (1985: 63–4). Again, one must jettison the picture of the real being passively 'out there'.

And one must also discard the Enlightenment notion demanding that only that which is noetically accessible, in the same way, to all possible knowers, is true. That narrow notion of truth would exclude virtually everything that human beings find to be of importance in the actual living of life, things like love, courage, beauty, and fidelity, in short, all the things that co-involve the one knowing. Should the

human notion of truth be that which is most common or that which matters most of all?

But the positivistic interlocutor will want to interject and insist that real knowing has been subverted with a foreign, faith-based epistemology: 'It's one thing to suggest that we perceive a form, but perception isn't knowledge!' Allow Rousselot to offer an answer. He writes:

One might perhaps object that in this instance we are called upon not to affirm or to deny, but only to understand. To which we reply that it is a mistake to consider our assent as a more or less voluntary act, as distinguished from the synthesis of the terms. Let us go back to the example of affirming a natural law; *perceiving the connection and giving one's assent* are one and the same thing. To perceive the connection is to perceive the clue as clue. But the clue cannot be perceived as clue without at the same time perceiving, by necessary correlation and with the same epistemic stringency, that to which it is the clue. (1990: 30)<sup>11</sup>

The difficulties do lie in the epistemology employed. In every act of knowledge, when I am trying to ascertain the place of a phenomenon within the world of the affirmed realities, various forms will be

<sup>11</sup> Rousselot 1990: 31–2 is also helpful here: 'Theologians will readily grant, supposing faith to be present, that its light can make credibility manifest. But there is no reason for explaining the first act of faith any differently, and refusing to say that the supernatural light illuminates the very act through which we acquire that initial faith. The clue is really cause of the assent we give to the conclusion, yet it is the perceived conclusion that sheds light on the clue, that endows it with meaning. The same is true when we come to believe: insofar as it makes the assent reasonable, the perceived clue precedes the assent; insofar as it is supernatural, it follows upon the assent. There are two orders, of rationality and of supernaturality, and we can construct some abstract scheme along the lines of either order. One may say "I see the virtue of a Christian; I conclude to the divine holiness of the Church; I make my profession of faith." Or one may say "I acquire from above a new power of seeing; I confess to the holiness of the Church, and I recognize the holiness of this man as an effect, an application, of the Church's holiness." These two logical sequences represent only aspects of the real, both of them true and both incomplete. Their truths are united and reconciled in the living unity of the affirmation. And there is no vicious circle. There would be a vicious circle—or a leap into the dark, an arbitrary and unjustified affirmation—only if the affirmed truth were absolutely prior to the condition of its affirmation, without in any way bringing it about through reciprocal causality. The same applies in the case of Hamlet or of the scientific law. The instantaneously acquired habit, call it *perceptive knowledge*, both precedes and follows its counterpart, *perceived knowledge*.' Similarly Lonergan will insist: '[A]n insight, an act of understanding, is a matter of knowing a cause' (Lonergan 1967: 14).



applied by me as I seek the closest match. This is what Lonergan meant by the progressive assimilation of human knowledge to proportionate Being by way of insight, which issues into conceptual formulations.

But Rousselot is concerned with a very distinctive apperception of form. When I perceive a form to be a message from an interlocutor, the response is quite different. The issue now is that I cannot fail to respond, cannot fail to involve myself. The form assigned, that of a interpersonal sign, makes demands upon the perceiver.

Here the *doctor gratiae* can be as helpful in the twenty-first century as he was in the fourth. Augustine asks how it is that some, but not others, can perceive something, which is not any given member of the world, nor their totality, but rather their form: 'Surely this beauty is apparent to all whose faculties are sound? Why, then, does it not speak the same message to all?' Another way of posing the same questions would be to ask how the human person is graced, by what faculty? Augustine answers, 'Animals, both small and large, see the beauty, but they are not able to question it, for in them reason does not hold sway as judge over the reports of the senses. Human beings *have the power to question*, so that by understanding the things he has made they may glimpse the unseen things of God...' Of course to raise the question of grace is immediately to appeal to human freedom. One can see and respond, or one can see and fail to respond and thus, over time, as Augustine will repeatedly insist, lose the uniquely human ability to see the things of God.

But by base love they subject themselves to these creatures, and once subject can no longer judge. Creatures do not respond to those who question unless the questioners are also judges: not that they change their voice—that is, their beauty—if one person merely sees it, while another sees and inquires, as though they would appear in one guise to the former, and differently to the latter; no, the beauty appears in the same way to both beholders, but to one it is dumb, and to another it speaks. Or rather, it speaks to all, but only they understand who test the voice heard outwardly against the truth within. (*Conf. X. 6. 10*; italics mine)

It should be noted that the judgement in question is not simply whether or not something within the world is found to be beautiful or not. It is that existential judgement, so prominent in Thomism,

wherein the human person, in the act of judging that which is, fundamentally grants to the singular affirmed element access into a world of existentially affirmed realities (Lonergan 1967: 87 and 146). Judgement in Thomism is essentially related to Being. To employ a Heideggerian phrase, it is precisely that moment in which the human person shepherds Being. Here Augustine links true knowledge of the world with the grace that is insight. Lack the latter, and you will never really know the former.

Augustine gave the West its first autobiography, but *The Confessions* is a history of two interlocutors, Augustine and the *You* to whom it is addressed. The *You* never appears as a *Deus ex machina* in the history, not even in the pivotal garden scene. There, Augustine only encounters words, namely, Paul's letter to the Romans. This much the positivist viewing the scene might have seen. What isn't seen is the *You* whom Augustine perceives to be speaking through those words of revelation. The 'words of revelation' only become revelatory through the intervention of the *You* who does not appear, save as the silent interlocutor of Augustine's desire.

For Augustine, the face of the *You* is only something to be revealed when his history stands forth as a totality. Hence the 'graced' role of memory in the *Confessions*. 'This I do within myself in the immense court of my memory; for there sky and earth and sea are readily available to me, together with everything that I have been able to perceive in them, apart from what I have forgotten. And there I come to meet myself' (*Conf. X. 8. 14*).<sup>12</sup>

For Augustine, the encounter with the *Other* takes place within the world, but only when the world itself is viewed as contingent, when, as Wittgenstein would say, the very fact of its existence calls for mysticism. In other words, world as nature must give way to world as history. 'The scene surveyed by the knower' surrenders to 'the surreptitious gaze of the *Other* by whom we are known'. This, Augustine the theologian insists, is ever the realm of grace:

O Light, Tobit saw you when despite the blindness of his carnal eyes he pointed out the path of life to his son, and strode unerringly ahead, born by the feet of charity. Isaac saw you, though his bodily eyes were dimmed and

<sup>12</sup> Note the Heideggerian, and Thomistic, creation of the self through exertion-in-time.

closed by age, when true insight was granted him in blessing his sons, not withstanding his inability to tell one from the other as he uttered his blessing. Jacob saw you when, likewise blinded by advanced age, he beheld by the radiant vision of his heart the tribes of the people that was to be, prefigured in his sons; and when, stretching out crossed hands in a gesture full of mystery, he laid them on his grandsons, Joseph's children, not in the way indicated by their father, who saw only the externals, but as he himself judged to be right by the vision that guided him from within. All these enjoyed the same Light, the Light that is one in itself and unites all who see and love it. (*Conf. X. 34. 52*)

Note that the *Other* is light, an 'active form' that presents itself and makes the world comprehensible in itself. In Greek substance-centered ontology, light enables the perception of form. It's a metaphor for the faculty of perception, drawn from nature and made preeminent in Plato's myth of the cave. It is the medium by which the intellectual unity in the diversity of experience is perceived.

By addressing the light, naming it *You*, Augustine introduces two novelties to the Greek system. First, he makes the intellect an active rather than a passive agent. Form is not simply perceived; it is imposed in the encounter with the *You* who is the light, since personalism immediately introduces freedom. Secondly, he suggests that engagement with the light, existential confidence in it and personal evocation of it, alters the faculty of perception itself. If every act of knowing involves the interaction of the self and the world, which is a fundamental assertion in the metaphysics of epistemology employed by Transcendental Thomism, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger, then Augustine's Christian personalism suggests that the very act of knowledge is dependent upon recognition, encounter, and acceptance of the *You* who stands *within* the act of knowing.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, this requisite epistemological personalism did not enter Western thought with Augustine. It begins with the evocative 'Abba, Father' of Jesus of Nazareth. Hence the paradoxical, but

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Heidegger 1962: 256–7. At 263 he writes, 'In so far as Dasein is its disclosedness essentially, and discloses and uncovers as something disclosed to this extent it is essentially "true". Dasein is "in the truth"'. This assertion has meaning ontologically. It does not purport to say that ontically Dasein is introduced "to all the truth" either always or just in every case, but rather that the disclosedness of its ownmost Being belongs to its existential constitution.'

terribly indicative, 'he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will"' (Luke 10: 21; Matt. 11: 25). This is not the Platonic light of emanation; it is the light of encounter. This is the knowledge that comes from love, a faculty available to children yet often dimmed in the learned.

When meaning itself is understood as both a quest and a grace, as that which is sought yet in the very act of seeking given, the already-but-not-yet of the Kingdom Jesus preached imposes itself upon Christian metaphysics, and history reveals itself as something that happens not only *within* the world, but more fundamentally *toward* the world. Ultimately, history is the quest for the meaning of the world. History is never the universal set of past actions. Humans cannot even think of grasping such a set! History is the ever-shifting set of past actions that now reveal themselves to be significant. As Heidegger insisted, human beings create history, because they query themselves about their ultimate disposition within the world. Rahner asserted of the human person:

[T]he question about being in its totality is the only question from which he cannot turn away, which he *must* ask if he wants *to be* at all, because only in this question is being in its totality (and so his own also) given to him, and this only as something questionable. For this reason the proposition stating the necessity of questioning in human existence includes in itself its own *ontological* proposition which says: man exists as the question about being. In order to be himself he necessarily asks about being in its totality. (1968: 57–8)

One has not understood Aquinas, or Heidegger, if one still thinks the question 'about Being' is one of objects rather than acts, of nature rather than history.

It is an article of faith (*fides quae*) that faith itself (*fides qua*) is a gift of God. It cannot be grasped through human agency alone. Of course, if faith is something akin to insight, one might well ask if any insight can be 'grasped' in such a way as to be simply handed over to another. To understand the nature of this unique insight, however, one must understand the nature of a sign.

## 5.5 SIGNS AND COMMUNION

Recall Wittgenstein's inkpot on the desk. The inkpot may be there because the philosopher was using it and simply neglected to replace it. Or the inkpot may be there as a sign that the desk should not be disturbed when the room is being cleaned. Notice that nothing within the world of Greek metaphysics alters in either case. Substances with their accidents remain in an ordered world, a hierarchy of being. One might want to say that nothing in the world has changed.

But for the person who recognizes the sign everything has changed! A new language game exists, a new nexus of relations. The human being's place, and task, in the world has fundamentally altered, because the human person is the knowing subject to which every element within the world is related.

In this case, I have seen the inkpot. I perceive and understand that I am not to clean the desk. What I will do in my world this morning is different than what I might have done if the professor had not placed the inkpot in the agreed position. The world has changed and not because a new empirical object has entered the world. The world has changed through the employment of language, through the fecundity of its relations.

In the thought of the later Wittgenstein, the world is language. It is composed of language, and therefore more essentially ordered toward *acts* of Being than *entities*. After all, language is always an event. Wittgenstein comes to give primacy to 'act' via an examination of language; Heidegger, through attentiveness to Being; and Aquinas arrived at the same place through meditating upon creation: the world understood as coming forth from the word of God. In each case the world is an essentially historical reality because language is a web of mutually related elements. Language shares this fundamental quality with a chess game. Change one element, and the value of every other element changes as well (Wittgenstein 1967: 47e; §108).

It all sounds rather prosaic, but to appreciate the metaphysical significance of 'noetic relationship' to human life, consider how relatively unexcited my soon-to-be fiancée is by the presence of rings in a jeweler's window, and then compare that to the excitement

she experiences by the presence of a ring in my proffered hand. What made one ring an unimportant element in the world and the second a vitally significant one? Greek thought, centered upon nature, is not very illuminating here. Wittgenstein is. A ring takes its meaning from its nexus in a skein of relationships. Any element within the world can be transformed precisely because it stands within the world that is human discourse, where the human person, Aquinas's *quoddammodo omnia*, stands necessarily at the very center.

Now consider an experience not frequent, but probably never absent from human life: the moment when someone perceives a form to be a sign. What must happen? Only one thing. I perceive in the form the presence of a person, because I perceive this form as having been invested with significance by someone else, by another interlocutor. Someone has made it a sign.

We sometimes use the word 'sign' to mean only the apperception of meaning, without an interlocutor. For example, I am heading to the promenade to watch the fireworks display, but, as I approach, I see the crowd returning and conclude that the display must have ended. I take the crowd streaming toward me as a sign, an indication of a fact. In this usage of the word 'sign', the only inference is that the speaker finds a given fact to be significant for meaningful interaction with the world. These signs are simply ciphers for previously perceived causes and effects. Smoke is a sign of fire, which is very different from smoke signals.

But there are also illuminating events that are distinctively human, because they reproduce the threshold of language itself, in which I suddenly perceive an element to be not only meaningful but also an invitation to share meaning with another. In short, I recognize a sign to be an act of communion. For example, I am at table, and someone's foot scrapes against my ankle. Significance? None. A foot scraped my ankle. I continue speaking. The foot scrapes again, but more forcefully. Now I think, that scrape might have been a kick, and a kick means something fundamentally different than a scrape. A few more words, and the foot becomes insistent. I realize that some kind interlocutor is telling me, signing to me, that my words are offensive or inappropriate for someone else at the table. I stop talking.

Everything in the world changes when that persistent foot moves from being a *meaningless* meander to a *meaningful* message. A sign

from an interlocutor is a message. It asserts that someone else shares my world. Language creates my world, and it is the medium through which I share that world with others. Every element of the world is potentially a sign, because the world is always linguistic, which is to say that it is ordered toward speaking, toward the communion that is language.

In speaking of knowledge giving way to desire, Christian discourse rests upon a fundamental perception, one I think shared with those beyond that discourse. The human being is, in the words of Aquinas, *quoddammodo omnia*, one who is oriented toward all that is, because all-that-is, is co-involved in the human person's own project of self-completion. We don't seek to know simply to collect. We seek because we yearn. A more Augustinian formula might simply assert that human life is restless; it is the gaping hunger that simply is. Rousselot once suggested that 'The real movement of the intelligence remains unexplained unless we view it, above all, as an active power of synthesis' (1990: 27).<sup>14</sup>

We have now arrived at a consideration of why it is the world itself that must speak, that the human person desires that it should speak. Because the human person is ordered toward all that is, toward the entire horizon that forms his or her world, nothing less than an address coming from the world itself would satisfy. Another way of expressing the same would be to say that if the desire is truly transcendent, that is, without limit, then only that which is itself unlimited can satisfy. Lonergan will insist that Aquinas, in holding both our intellectual inability to grasp the essence of God, and, at the same time, the radical sterility of our human nature if frustrated in this desire, must himself conceive of human knowledge as the 'unrestricted desire to know'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Newman 1979: 260, 'I am of the mind that our natural mode of reasoning is not, from propositions to propositions, but from things to things, from concrete to concrete, from whole to wholes.' And at 269, 'Judgment then in all concrete matter is the architectonic faculty; and what may be called the Illative Sense, or right judgment in ratiocination, is one branch of it.' Wittgenstein's *Investigations* take up the synthetic faculty of knowledge in §§285 and 378. See also pp. 197–8 and 203.

<sup>15</sup> Lonergan 1958: 369. 'First, he recognized an unrestricted desire to know. As soon as we learn of God's existence, we wish to understand his nature and so by our nature we desire what by our nature we cannot achieve' (*STI* q. 12; I-II q. 3 a. 8; *Sum. c. gen.* III. 25–63).

Here the non-believing interlocutor could rightly note that nothing more has been suggested than the transcendence of humanity itself. For many, the very title 'humanist' suggests just this, that human life itself is to be revered because it is potentially everything. It should be noted that the Christian interlocutor would not want to contest such an evaluation. Nor should such an interlocutor be offended when the non-believer questions the significance of Christian discourse for the pursuit of a meaningful human life. A benign humanist interlocutor might suggest that Christianity itself, like other religions, is only a way of expressing, in now-dated mythological language, the fundamental self-reverence that should characterize human life.

Two responses. The first requires asking, and genuinely considering, if human life can be a 'hunger-for-all', that never finds satiety. If one defines the human project as a desire that is never met and can never be met, has one not defined humanity as meaningless? This was the question raised in Joseph Maréchal's groundbreaking study of Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge, *Le Point de départ de la métaphysique* [1944–9] (1964). Maréchal was careful not to suggest that the only completion humanity could satisfactorily receive would be divine life itself. This would seem to make God the *necessary* end of human life and hence threaten divine transcendence. In what sense can God, or grace, be called a free gift if it is *due* to humanity by virtue of humanity's own inner constitution?

Yet the problem is a grammatical one, which is to say that its correct solution requires questioning the picture we possess. Begin with the fundamental gospel assertion that human life *must* find its completion in God. When one translates this assertion into a metaphysical system constructed upon the model of nature, one in which the human person is defined as essentially static, or closed, one must then explain why we don't experience the self that way. This leads to the employment of a theological construct, a 'pure nature' which is juxtaposed to the essentially open, yearning nature that we actually experience. The picture of 'pure nature' pays its debt to the Greek view, while Christianity then speaks of a supernatural overlay. The danger, as already noted, is that the overlay may then not appear as essential to the human project. The better question is asking whether



the picture of pure nature is adequate to the *yearning that simply is* the human experience.

We use the word ‘meaning’ when human thought sees elements within the world as fruitfully conjoined. In what sense can human life, which here means the human world in which we dwell, individually and collectively, be called meaningful if it cannot be conjoined to something outside itself? ‘The sense of the world must lie outside the world’ (Wittgenstein 1961: 71; §6.41).

Language is nothing more, or less, than a wondrous web of connected meanings. What speaks itself and what is, are fecundly circumniveous. But what is the meaning of language if it is not fundamentally linked to something beyond itself? Put another way, who ultimately speaks in language and to whom?

## 5.6 GRACE AS CHRISTIC

If the first question enquires into the meaningfulness of the discourse that is human life, the second explores an essential requirement of it, and it is this second question that introduces what might be called the graced, or Christic, element of human knowing. Indeed, if what follows is true to the fonts of Christian discourse, the ‘graced’ can be nothing less than the ‘Christic’, since, for the Christian, Christ is *the* event of grace, the complete, and completely unique, expression of God’s favor.

The Christian interlocutor wants to suggest that the Christ event, or something like it, is a necessary prerequisite of language’s heuristic character. We name, or bring into language, in order to encompass. One should say ‘or something like it’ to note that one must be wary of philosophically constructing a need for what one already considers self-justified. Of course, for the Christian believer, the Christ event is self-justifying, an assertion that will require further attention. But fundamental theology seeks to engage those outside of Christian discourse. So the direction of the quest must move from that which is common among the interlocutors to that which distinguishes their positions. It is certainly appropriate to begin with what might be considered a fundamental human requirement for possible

communion with the divine. It is another, distinctive step to ascertain that just this requirement has been met, in a self-validating manner, in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. For the sake of clarity, that is not the project of this essay.

Why is humanity in search of what might be designated a Christic principle? Because the world in which the human person finds the self to be co-involved requires twin foci. Although the self cannot be separated from the world, the self does not collapse into it. We experience ourselves as incomplete within the world, as seeking to engage the world in order to come to completion. Yet the world by definition eludes the knowing subject. We can describe worldviews, but we cannot sum up the world in any theorem. No image serves to depict the world, yet the human subject requires what can simply, and yet quite accurately, be called a world.

Language gives us the world. We can only engage the world through language. So even when we want to indicate the totality that cannot become an object of knowledge, cannot be the sum of any collection of words, we must nonetheless find a word. Fortunately, after Wittgenstein, we no longer stand under the illusion that the word must designate or represent the world as *object*. It need only *evoke*, call into engagement, the fundamental horizon that is human striving.

Humanity has a fundamental intuition that it is not alone, which is another way of saying that its striving is not destined for teleological nullity. Yet this striving is an act, the most fundamental of all human acts. Humans act constantly *in view of the whole*, which is to say that every human action, every piece of human knowledge, finds its meaning only in relation to the whole. But relation is always hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> Elements within the world must be ordered, evaluated, placed in order of significance.

Language requires a hierarchical principle. We would know nothing if our knowledge were not directed toward engagement. Human knowledge is not a *tabula rasa*; such a putative faculty would only collect the dust of ephemera. Our knowledge is always a grasping, a

<sup>16</sup> Even the most simple, bipolar relationship is hierarchical, because strictly speaking no relationship can be bipolar. A can only be related to B by standing in the same field C. In other words, evoking distinction, the many, always asserts commonality, the one.

pursuit of a *perceived* importance which then leads *ad infinitum* to subsequent perceptions. Aquinas repeatedly insists that human knowledge is an absorption of the thing known by the knower, a phrase poignantly identifying the fundamental drive that is knowledge.

The rise of the empirical sciences demanded that the perceiver, to the extent possible, remove himself, which is to say his accumulated insights and preferences, the vast majority of which would be collective, from the act of perception. In this way the objectivity of the noetic enterprise was to be ensured. No one would want to attest the validity of self-extrication in the empirical method. The current, cultural difficulty is that the empirical method has led to the formation of an empirically based epistemological ethos, which includes the absurd presumption that the most important things humans discover are precisely those which least engage the self. What is so often ignored, even in the empirical sciences, is the role of the knowing self in the necessarily hierarchical determination of just what knowledge is to be sought. Even granting the serendipitous nature of many discoveries, correct answers generally come from asking the pertinent questions. So, for example, grants (as in financial) are not bestowed upon individuals who would describe their research as looking for 'whatever turns up'.

Ultimately the drive that is the acquisition of knowledge is only possible, though human thought insufficiently adverts to the necessity, because humanity sees its project as ordered toward a *hieros*, a sacred thing. The Latin roots of the word 'sacred' evoke that which is cut off, that which is distinctly other. What makes the other sacred is both its desirability and its position outside the self. Human beings have always used words such as 'sacred' to connote the utter desirability of that which lies *whither*.

The Christian ultimately wants to suggest that humanity, in order to be itself, must find something holy, something distinctively other, something outside itself, something truly worthy of that striving that the human person cannot fail to exert. Bluntly put, the creation of a world requires something nuptial, namely a desirous lover and the object of that desire. This 'nuptial' character of human striving finds its explicitly Christic element in a consideration of the world-bound character of human knowledge. Something must be there *for the world* and yet, like the human subject, be *within the world*. The

expression 'for the world' is only a way of designating what believers have always called God. 'Within the world' suggests that anything completely *out of the world* could never be known, which is to say engaged, by those within the world. Some word, on the part of the radically Other, must become a reality within the world, must engage the world as surely as the human person does. This is the *Christic* antipode in the creation of the world, and it is the metaphysical meaning of the word 'grace'. If humanity loves, desires to complete the self in one other than the self, then it must name the Beloved in order to engage that love, because anything unnamed is not yet invited into the world. It simply is not.

Of course in designating this antipode as *Christic* the Christian is also asserting that this antipode has been found preeminently and definitely in the person and history of Jesus of Nazareth. The primary question in this discussion is whether intelligent striving would want to characterize itself as essentially un-Christic, which here is simply to say 'unordered'. If human knowledge is ordered, it must find a way to give expression to this ordering. Like the words 'nature' and 'world' a simple word must connote an expansive human drive for knowledge. Where 'nature' grounds the human need to express purposefulness and 'world' evokes the absolute openness of human striving, and the word 'God' expresses the profound human desire for fruition, the word 'Christ' designates a fruition that consists in being summoned and grasped by the other. Lonergan insisted,

The real is known by the rational 'Yes;' but the real also must be imaginable; and since imagination is ever fluid, the real attains the stability of reality only when it is named. Similarly, real difference is to be known by comparative negations; but mere judgments are not enough; there also must be different images and different names; and, inversely, differences in image and in name can result in an acknowledgment of different realities. (1958: 537–8)

Lonergan underscores a collective Thomistic insight, one shared by Wittgenstein and Heidegger. A question can only be posed when one has an inchoate understanding of the answer to be expected. But as Wittgenstein insists, even this inchoate coordinate must occupy some region within the skein that is language. The word used does not designate the answer, but one or more words at least evoke its existence.

Kierkegaard rightly realized that with the doctrine of creation, the world itself is made contingent and therefore essentially historical (1985: 75–6). It therefore necessarily awaits, in time, an encounter with something other than itself. For him, Christianity is the historical positing of the evocative word that summons knowledge itself to awaken.

Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that despite the historical—indeed, precisely by means of the historical—has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him otherwise than merely historically, has wanted to base his happiness on his relation to something historical. No philosophy (for it is only for thought), no mythology (for it is only for the imagination), no historical knowledge (which is for memory) has ever had this idea—of which in this connection one can say with multiple meanings that it did not arise in any human heart. (1985: 109)

The Christian tradition asserts that Christ is not simply *an expression* of God, an event purely *ad nos*. If the latter were the case, then one possible expression (of God) might well be replaced with some other expression. Christ is the *self-expression* of God, which is to say, an act within the divine itself, the recognition of which serves as both an explanation of the reasonableness of the Christ event and its ultimate validation.

One of the most trenchant and perduring of Rahner's contributions to contemporary theology was his assertion that the doctrine of the Trinity, if it is to possess real, existential meaning, must be founded upon a true, triadic human experience that is itself irreducible. Rahner did not reduce the immanent Trinity to the economic. He simply insisted, first, that grace can be experienced, and secondly, that we experience it in a tripartite manner.

Begin with a fundamental, post-linguistic 'given' of human life. Of course, only the formulation is post-linguistic. The distinction lies at the beginning of Greek thought. That which is, the *ontos*, and that which expresses itself, the *logos*, are circumincessive.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Lonergan 1958: 555. 'We are now, perhaps, in a position to come to grips with our problem, namely, the relation between truth and expression. We began by emphasizing the distinction between knowledge and its expression. But we followed up this contention with no less insistence on the genetic interpenetration of knowledge and language. Because of this interpenetration there arises the conviction that,

Why circumincessive rather than identical? One might want to suggest because only the *ontos* truly is; the *logos* is only what we say there is. Greek thought immediately recognized the possibility of error. We might speak the wrong word. True enough, but the profundity of our Greek inheritance is only realized when one inverts the order between the *logos* and the *ontos* to see the fundamental decision made by the Greek world. Of course the *logos* can fail to depict the *ontos*, but the *ontos* is more than an 'at hand' check, that which verifies the *logos*. The Greek mind didn't choose to speak of both an *ontos* and a *logos* simply to provide surety to the *logos*. It spoke of the *ontos* to express the fecundity of the *logos*. The *ontos* is that which is not-yet-called-into-Being, called into language, by the *logos*. A single word bears the weight of expressing the transcendence of language, of the ever-expanding human desire to know.

Wittgenstein is particularly helpful when one begins to debate the word used to designate that which lies beyond. What should be clear is that whatever word is chosen, it will be a language game that is afoot, and therefore the very meaning of the word is to be comprehended by means of the nexus that is the game. When Western metaphysics chose to speak of the word 'Being' it never simply designated the existence of beings. Beings within the world are within the world. To be in the world is already to have the status of being in the world. On this level, Kant was right. Existence is not a predicate. It is not something that needs to be asserted. But of course, after the linguistic turn, Kant is profoundly wrong.

What Wittgenstein has taught us is that, existentially speaking, existence *is* a predicate. And we have no ways of speaking other than the existential. When discourse sounds as though it has no relationship to the human person, obfuscation is present. Simply put, that which is not spoken does not find its place within language. It does not enter the world!

Not unless one considers, or wishes to evoke, the very contingency of the world itself, which is precisely what a creation-inspired thinker like Aquinas desired to do. If the world itself comes forth from God,

while knowing and stating are distinct, still they run so much together that they are inseparable. What is known, what is meant, and what is said, can be distinguished; but the distinctions point merely to differences of aspect in what inevitably is the same thing.'

and expands, some word must be chosen to designate the sheer potential and contingency of the world. If one follows Wittgenstein, it really doesn't matter if one chooses to designate the origin and expansion, with Aquinas and Heidegger, as 'Being' or, as the later Heidegger and many contemporaries now might, as 'Nothing'.

If one understands the nature of a language game and our human inability to think in any other way, as a word, 'Nothing' is as hierarchical as the word 'Being' since 'Nothing' has no meaning apart from 'something'. Both stand within a field of meaning and signification, and the field is again the question of human purposefulness.

The advantage of the word 'Being' is that it evokes the positive, the potential. Its disadvantage is that it immediately throws the epistemological fundamentalist, which is an apt name for a positivist, into a frenzied denial. Being is thought of as an occult object lying beyond beings, and it can't be located. In a deconstructionist mood, one might propose the word 'Nothing' rather than 'Being'. 'Nothing' at least stands free from the onus of misconstrual. An epistemological fundamentalist sounds rather silly denying the existence of nothing, and yet 'Nothing' remains a relational concept (a neoplasm!). We only use it in language games to stand over against something.

Yet in a different key a creation-centered thinker can feel quite comfortable in asserting that we come forth from nothing, because, properly understood, that 'nothing' is here designating the expansion of human knowledge, out into nothingness. The drawback is that the word carries negative rather than positive overtones vis-à-vis the ultimate value of that knowledge.

Only a thorough understanding of Thomistic, creation-centered metaphysics, a 'not yet', can free the system from the current charge of logocentrism, or hegemony of the logos. If the *logos* is seen as capturing, or representing, or even giving-expression-to the *ontos*, the option of Parmenides, one is immediately faced with the question of whether or not the proper adequation has taken place, and, if correspondence can no longer be shown, then it can only be imposed, and thus the charge of logos hegemony seems irrefutable. But if the *logos* is viewed as the always not-yet invocation of the *ontos*, any putative hegemony would be founded upon an unfathomable depth. It is an 'already' that stands ever ready to be summoned and judged

by the 'not yet'. Thus the very doctrine of creation is a way of asserting that the world is essentially open-ended. It comes forth from the not-yet of God. To say that it is contingent is simply to say that it remains under the dominion of God's own 'not-yet'.

When Christians assert that the world is created *ad imaginem Verbi* they further assert that the world possesses a teleology, but it is a teleology of the 'already-but-not-yet' of the Kingdom of God. Something has been given, but only in kernel. In other words, when a Christian claims that in Jesus the Christ the meaning of the world has been discovered, she is not saying that such a meaning has been handed over, like some putative object over which one might claim hegemony. On the contrary, what has been revealed is the world *as meaningful*. The Christian cannot sum up the meaning of the world, because meaning, as always 'not-yet', isn't subject to summation. Yet knowing the world to be meaningful, which is to say, destined to be sublated into the meaning of God, is to know the world itself as graced, favored.

When the Fathers of the Church asserted that Christ was himself the desired *Logos* of Greek thought, they ultimately asserted the essentially graced nature of human discourse. Like the world, it comes forth from a sheer abyss of Nothing—Being—Not-yet, but it is destined to be collated into the *Verbum* that will someday be revealed as the meaning of the world (cf. Hart 1998). What the Greek, and ultimately the Western, mind insists upon is that what dwells within language, the world that is the *logos*, is fundamentally worthy of engagement. Human life is a potency worth pursuing. 'Now I am tempted to say that the right expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, though it is not any proposition *in* language, is the existence of language itself' (Wittgenstein 1965: 11).

Contrast the Western mind with other options. One can choose, either in ancient Eastern variants, or in post-modern nihilism, to suggest that the world itself is illusion. Of course an illusion can't call itself into question. Eastern thought suggests that one of the two poles in the act of perception is ephemeral, and thus the self evaporates into the absolute. Post-modern nihilism shrinks the world into the solipsism of the self; it becomes nothing more than the linguistic-cultural creation of the self. In either case a



polarity needed for potency and act, a polarity which creates the possibility of acting, is lost.

Christianity finds itself in the unique position of proclaiming that its primal experience of grace, the favor of God revealed in the Christ event, is itself an experience that reveals God *to be* grace, which is to say that in Christianity God can look with favor, or love, upon God's own self. God knows and delightedly desires within God's own self.<sup>18</sup> This love, which exists within God, the love of Father, Son, and Spirit, recasts the primal favoring that is the act of creation, though the mutual implications of the doctrines of the Trinity and of grace are more easily seen when their metaphysical forms are recast.

When metaphysics moves from an object-based focus to one that is relationship based, it remains comprehensible to define God as that which possesses the fullness of Being, which is fully in act. Review the meaning of potency and act in Aquinas. The saint was very careful never to define prime matter in the crudely physical way by which the term is often pictured. Prime matter is not an amorphous, material entity waiting to assume form. On the contrary, it is potentiality itself. It is, to use an earlier term, the *ontos* (the not-yet) awaiting engagement with the *logos*.

If one slips into an object-focused picture, God appears at the apex of the metaphysics, because in the mind of God all essences are fully realized. The oddity of this picture is that it makes the mind of God the map of the world, that which guarantees the reality of the world in which humans dwell. God becomes anchor of the world.

Make relationship, fecund communion, the apex of metaphysics, and the Trinity stands forth as the assertion that God is the fullness of relationship. God knows and loves even before God creates. That which is the *ontos*, God, is fully in act; it gives itself over into, expresses itself as, the *logos*. Here I am not ignoring Heidegger's ontological difference. In using the metaphor *ontos* of God I am not making God one being amidst many others. Nor am I aligning God with what Heidegger called Being. Like Augustine, I am simply

<sup>18</sup> 'Delightedly desires' was chosen to suggest both constant desire and its continual fulfillment. Rejected were 'delighted desire' and 'desired delight' because these suggest stasis. 'Delighting desire' and 'desiring delight' can serve, given the grammatical nexus.

suggesting that a dichotomy present in human existence can be used to image the Trinity.

To be unexpressed is simply not to be. In early Christian discourse the Father is defined as the source or *arche* of the Godhead, who fecundly and completely expresses himself in the *Logos*. What expresses itself speaks. The human-experienced dichotomy between what expresses and what is said, between potency and act, is understood in Christian revelation as rooted in the Godhead itself. God is ever-realized act, and the only reason to place potency, even metaphorically, in the same sentence with God is because human thought has no other way of expressing the dynamism that Christianity asserts is most characteristic of God.

The difficulty with the dichotomy of potency and act that Aquinas inherited from Aristotle is an unfortunate picture that often accompanies it, one in which dynamism or movement seems to characterize 'potency' while rest characterizes 'act'. This is of course not the picture intended by either Aristotle or Aquinas. Potency is a coming into act, but act is only the cessation of potency, not of activity. Perhaps nothing more perfectly images the act of God than language itself. As Wittgenstein insisted, it is already complete, yet ever more fecund (1967: 8e; §18). Language is in order as it stands (1967: 45e; §98). It lacks nothing, and yet it cannot cease to exist as exploding fecundity.

Only after the linguistic turn can one say that God is dynamic because God is interlocutive. God is delighting desire/desiring delight, though not the desire that characterizes human life, that of something coming into act from potency. To be God is to be realized, ever realizing, and ever to be realized desire. Remember how far superior, to a child, the days before Christmas are to Christmas day itself.

An interlocutor may immediately suggest that a believer has once again defined humanity and then projected this definition back upon the divine. One must first respond by asking for a more complete description of the human project than that of ceaseless striving. Secondly, one must insist that, because the doctrine of the Trinity evokes the perfect *reditio completa in seipsum* of the *ontos* into the *logos*, what is ultimately being asserted by the believer is a fundamental confidence in the striving *logos* that is human life.

The *ontos* fully realizes itself by passing over into the *logos*. Silence speaks itself, and so inaugurates the fecundity that is language. Yet the Son, the *Logos*, is the complete expression of the Father and can be loved by the Father. God is purposeful, fecund, potent relationship. The begetting of the Son is not yearning, not strictly speaking a striving. It is a superabundance, a dichotomy that exists only to enjoy its own alterity. If grace is favor, then God is grace, because the Father favors, turns toward, the Son. Because God is relationship, the Spirit is not an inert bond between two persons. To be this bond, to be this relationship, is to be God, because God is relationship, an assertion that seems strained in the light of Greek metaphysics, where relation is a weak category of existence, unable to be self-sustaining, but which paradoxically takes on new prominence in a post-modern context, where relations form essences. Where Western thinking on the Trinity traditionally begins by asserting the single nature of the Godhead, and then considers the three persons, post-modern thought finds itself more aligned with Eastern Christian approaches, which take as their starting point the plurality of persons.

Two implications immediately follow. Creation itself is not an emanation from the Godhead. It must be a free act, because love requires freedom. Love is the pinnacle of relationship, because it is that moment when relationship exists between distinct *knowers*, remembering that knowledge has been defined as desire. If the relation of love, the apex of knowledge, is made the apex of metaphysics, then only a Trinity can be creator. God must be love.

If God must create in order to find another to love, if God must emanate, then God is dependent upon creation in order to arrive at the fullness of being. Monotheism finds itself having to sacrifice either the doctrine of creation, or the freedom of God in the act of creation, and hence God's transcendence. The doctrine of the Trinity insists that God was love before God was creator, which makes creation itself not a necessary act of God but rather the sheer super-abundance of grace.

We have arrived circuitously at a foundational Trinitarian affirmation of both Augustine and Aquinas: that the very act of creation is inherently Trinitarian. Augustine asserted that the trace of the Trinity is to be found in every creature (*De Trin.* VI. 10); whereas Aquinas taught that 'the processions of the persons are also in some way the

cause and type of creation' (*ST I* q. 45 a. 7 ad 3).<sup>19</sup> Words are born of desire. This humans know of themselves. The revelation of the Most Holy Trinity teaches us that delighting desire/desiring delight speaks its Word, and that God is the relation between desire and word. God is Trinity.

This brings into relief another foundational Christian assertion about grace, hopefully one which, having been reached, provides a place of egress for this essay. Grace is ultimately neither object nor energy but rather nothing less than a sharing in God's own self. When God simply is fecund, favoring, graced, relationship, then to know such a relationship, to see knowledge itself as a relationship for which we were created, is to receive God's own self, grace.

<sup>19</sup> As Flick and Alszeghy capitulate the latter's teaching, 'Since in God the intellectual action can be in the Father only inasmuch as it is generated in the Word, and in the Word only to the extent that it is generated by the Father, and the act of volition can be in the Father and the Son only to the extent that they breathe forth the Holy Spirit, and in the Holy Spirit only to the extent that he is breathed forth by the Father and the Son, St. Thomas can say that the divine processions are necessary for the production of creation; in fact that creation has as its cause the intellect and volition of God' (1982: 38).

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