SURPRISED BY TRUTH: THE DRAMA OF REASON IN FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY[1]

• D. C. Schindler •

"The event of revelation . . . can take reason wholly by surprise, even shatter its expectations, demand a rethinking of everything it previously thought from top to bottom, and yet remain perfectly rational . . . on one condition only: that it is the very nature of reason in its normal, everyday constitution, to be taken by surprise."

What can it mean to say that Christianity is true? This seemingly simple question contains a profound theoretical difficulty. We would be unable to affirm the truth of Christianity unless it made a claim on the assent of human reason, but such a claim is possible only if it in turn resonates in some respect within reason's own intrinsic necessities. To ask the question concerning the truth of Christianity plunges us immediately into a problem that lies at the center of fundamental theology, the discipline that inquires into the possibility

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of theology.[2] As a *logos*, a rational discourse, about God, theology is in some sense a human activity. But what distinguishes theology from philosophy, which possesses its own discourse about God, is that theology has its ultimate foundation not in reason's own exigencies, nor in natural evidences, but in that which properly speaking comes from *beyond* reason's horizon, and indeed in some sense from beyond the world itself: namely, in revelation.[3] Is rational discourse about God, then, possible? Indeed, is there in principle such a thing as a reasonable theologian?

If we admit this apparently unlikely possibility, we would seem to run the risk of reducing revelation to its universally accessible "sense" (are not the truths of reason necessarily universal?), thus depriving it precisely of its revealed character, forfeiting any genuine difference between faith and reason, theology and philosophy. But if we reject such a reduction and insist on revelation's transcendence with respect to reason, we would seem to condemn theology to the realm of the esoteric and irrational. With characteristic pithiness, Blondel expresses the difficulty that confronts fundamental theology in his *Letter on Apologetics* (1896): "If one insists on the conformity of dogmas with the requirements of human thought, one runs the risk of seeing in them nothing but a human doctrine of the most excellent kind; if one lays it down at the outset that it surpasses human reason and even disconcerts human nature, then one abandons the chosen ground and the field of rational investigation."[4] As revealed, the truth of Christianity cannot have been deduced or otherwise rationally inferred from the nature of man or the world. In other words, it arrives from beyond reason. However, it is just this transcendent and gratuitous character that would seem necessarily to deprive it of any binding force. If it is "imposed" simply from above, it carries with it no rational obligation; it would

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[2]The two central themes of fundamental theology are revelation and its credibility: *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 326–327.

[3]"The truth Revelation allows us to know is neither the mature fruit nor the highest reach of the reflections of human reason," *Fides et ratio*, 15 [=*FR*] (translation, slightly modified, from *Restoring Faith in Reason*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons [London: SCM Press, 2002], 29).

[4]Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 138.

resemble in this respect another nation's customs or laws: curious, perhaps even daunting, but nevertheless not having any claim on me.

In order to avoid these two horns of the dilemma, we will have to find some way of affirming both the discontinuity of revelation with respect to reason *as well as* a certain continuity. I wish to propose in the present paper that the only way to fulfill both requirements is with a dramatic notion of truth.[5]

Before we begin this discussion, it is worth noting that the problem of fundamental theology we are addressing holds significance not only for endeavors in apologetics, but for theology in general, and perhaps even more for philosophy. It may seem to be too late to raise the question of the possibility of rational discourse about God's self-revelation: if theology is actual, after all, it must be possible. Nevertheless, we ought to see that the character of theology will be determined to some extent by the view of reason operative within it. If the "revelational" dimension of Christianity remains simply extrinsic to reason, theology will not possess the capacity to see Christianity as an organic *whole*, but will tend instead to reduce it positivistically to some aspect, for example, to a collection of propositions of faith. It will be unable to penetrate *into* dogma or reflectively appropriate it but will inevitably collapse into mere history, fideism, biblical positivism, moralism, or a program of social justice and political action. The sole task that a well-known Australian fundamental theologian accords to reason in theology is that of "clarifying concepts" and "providing criteria for verifying the specific claims that are made."[6] To be genuinely *contemplative*,

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[5]To be sure, it is not necessary for a theory of knowledge to be *explicitly* dramatic in order to do justice to the problem of fundamental theology, but it must nonetheless affirm the simultaneity of continuity and discontinuity in some fashion. For another approach that articulates a notion of knowledge with a view to the problem of the appropriation of revelation, see R. Fisichella, "Oportet philosophari in theologia (III)," *Gregorianum* 76, no. 4 (1995): 701–728; here, 701–715.

[6]See Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *Retrieving Fundamental Theology: The Three Styles of Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 39. One might suggest that, in giving philosophy the task of establishing the criteria of verification in this particular sense, O'Collins accords reason both too much and too little. On the one hand, such a task implies a rather empiricist or positivist—i.e., impoverished—view of reason; on the other hand, to allow such a notion of reason the authority over revelation to provide the measure for this latter clearly undermines the divine character of revelation from the outset. *Fides et ratio*, by contrast, envisions reason's role in theology not as an extrinsic logical instrument, but as a contemplative

theology must be what Balthasar has called a "seeking theology," and this requires taking reason's needs as in some sense its own.[7]

But, of course, to do so raises the question of the nature of the reason whose needs it takes on. Here we have to address the proper aspiration of philosophy. It seems obvious that the question of the relationship between reason and revelation would lie altogether outside the competency and therefore the concern of philosophy. Indeed, we would expect philosophy to plead that it has not yet finished with the question concerning the possibility of knowing the *world*, much less the question of knowing what lies *beyond* the natural order, and that it does not in fact expect to resolve even the more modest question anytime soon. But we ought to note that these two questions are not unrelated: there is a certain analogy between reason's capacity to know the world, which as its "other" lies in some sense beyond reason itself, and its capacity to have access to what transcends it altogether. Moreover, if reason were capable of grasping the altogether transcendent, this would represent its highest act. If the possibility of this act were excluded a priori and as a matter of principle from philosophy's scope, it would undermine the impulse that all the great thinkers have recognized as reason's defining feature: an *eros* ordered to the ultimate, the original, and the comprehensive. What Nietzsche says about love applies to this eros as well: if limits are set to its aspirations from the outset, it inevitably suffers an internal collapse.[8] According to Socrates, there is in fact nothing more fundamentally destructive to philosophical reason than this a priori limitation of its possibility (*Meno*, 86b–c). When reason accepts such limits at the outset, it devolves into a meager and,

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faculty ordered to being and united *intrinsically* to faith: cf. *FR*, 97.

[7]R. Fisichella observes that, because of the transcendence of revelation, the work of understanding is in principle *never* finished: "Oportet philosophari in theologia (I)," *Gregorianum* 76, no. 2 (1995): 221–262; here, 222. The essay in which Balthasar most extensively develops the contemplative dimension that philosophy contributes to theology is "Philosophy, Christianity, Monasticism," in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. II: *Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 333–372.

[8]See the aphorisms on love in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Anthologien: Vom vornehmen Menschen, Vergeblichkeit*, and *Von Gut und Böse* (Freiburg i. Br.: Johannes Verlag, 2000), 90–91. The aphorisms in this three-part anthology were selected and arranged by Balthasar.

consequentially for some, a contemptible instrument, which tests formal consistency in thinking but can never lay hold of what *is*.

As we have initially presented it, this problem arises within fundamental theology because of a notion of reason that is defined by its immanent necessities: in Kierkegaard's words, "All thought breathes in immanence."[9] Postmodern thinkers have identified such a notion of reason as the dominant one in modern philosophy, if not in the Western tradition more generally.[10] The limits of the present context make it impossible to explore the provenance of this notion in any detail. Nevertheless, in order to illuminate the significance of the dramatic notion of truth that one can draw from Balthasar's thought, it is first necessary, in the first part of the paper, briefly to outline the basic contours of certain pivotal epistemologies, with a view to their tendency toward "immanence." I hasten to point out that I am not investigating these epistemologies for their own sake, but simply as a way of focusing the problem we are addressing, and thus I do not claim to be offering the best possible interpretation of these thinkers. In fact, I will be overlooking fruitful ambiguities and creative possibilities, and highlighting instead the more straightforward implications of basic affirmations in their philosophies. After laying out, in the second part of the paper, the principles of a dramatic conception of truth in Balthasar's thought, I will suggest in the third and final section how this conception provides a response to the problem at the basis of fundamental theology.

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[9]Soren Kierkegaard, "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," in *The Present Age* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 91. In this essay, Kierkegaard addresses precisely the same concern we are addressing in the present paper, but he ends with what we might call a non-dramatic paradox in the relation between reason and revelation: namely, pure discontinuity. Such a conclusion is necessary once one defines reason, as Kierkegaard does, in its natural operation wholly in terms of immanence.

[10]See, e.g., Emmanuel Levinas' description of "Narcissism, or the Primacy of the Same," in his essay "Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite," in *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, by Adriaan Peperzak (West LaFayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1993): 94–105. Here, he judges correctly that, given such a notion of reason, "The essence of truth will then not be in the heteronomous relationship with an unknown God, but in the already-known which has to be uncovered or freely invented in oneself, and in which everything known is comprised. It is fundamentally opposed to a God that reveals" (96).

1.

Plato brings us directly into the heart of the matter. In the *Meno*, Socrates articulates the quandary that has come to be known as Meno's paradox. When he asks whether it is possible, in fact, to learn anything at all, the question amounts to whether it is possible to introduce something essentially *new* into the soul. In other words, can reason be genuinely taken by surprise? Is it capable of receiving anything other than what it always-already anticipates, can it welcome anything but an expected guest? Socrates' answer is negative; learning is impossible, he says: one cannot find what one is not looking for, and one cannot look for something unless one already "possesses" it, that is, already knows what it is (*Meno*, 80e). The most fundamental things, thus, cannot be received by the soul as something other than itself, but must be presupposed as part of the soul's reality; to use Plato's language, they cannot be discovered, but only recollected. In this case, reason can have access to what transcends it only if it is already built into reason, which means only if it does not in fact transcend reason.

What seems like mere sophistry turns out to present a truly formidable difficulty which has been repeatedly confirmed by other major thinkers in history. We see it, for example, both in the Aristotelian/Thomistic and in the Kantian notions of the cognitive faculty of the soul. Aristotle, at first glance, seems to avoid the problem with his more empirical epistemology. In fact, he addresses the Meno paradox directly in the *Prior Analytics* (2.21) and the *Posterior Analytics* (1.1), and implicitly also in the *Metaphysics* (1.9). But in these texts, he affirms only that *particulars* (τά καθ' ἕκαστον) can be learned, and that they can be learned only on the basis of a universal (καθόλον) which is *already* known. Indeed, he also ultimately affirms that particulars, in any event, cannot be *known* as such. If we press the inquiry and ask after the origin of knowledge of universals, we eventually discover that Aristotle ends up affirming the same principle as Plato, however much the terms may have changed. Knowledge, according to Aristotle, is an actualization of the soul. Every actualization presupposes not only a general potentiality for knowledge, but a specific potential *for* this particular actuality.[11] But to be so disposed, of course, presupposes the actuality

[11]See *De Anima*, 2.2 (414a26–28), 3.4 (429a10–18), 3.5 (18–25).

itself. Thus, act is prior to potency. The soul cannot take into itself, in other words, anything that it does not already have "space" for, a prior disposition for. To be sure, such a pre-determined potentiality has room for an infinite variety of particulars, but it lacks the capacity to be taken by surprise in a fundamental way. If reason were able to know something, it would after all *already* have the capacity for it, and the capacity is derivative of the completed act. An object for the soul that was in some sense "discontinuous" with the soul's potentialities would simply make no sense for Aristotle. Any apparent surprise turns out to be nothing more than an unfolding of the soul's already latent potential. Whatever the human soul knows is necessarily humanly knowable.

We arrive at a similar conclusion if we take our bearings from the essential definition of truth that Aquinas offers in his *De veritate*, namely, truth as *adequatio intellectus et rei*.[12] Although Aquinas affirms that the act of knowledge—in the speculative rather than the practical order—takes its measure not from the soul but from the object known, nevertheless, insofar as the *adequatio* is a joining of two terms, the object's measure must be accommodated by the soul, and is therefore to that extent determined by the soul's intrinsic capacities: "Now the fulfillment of every motion or operation," Aquinas says, "lies in its end. The motion of the cognitive power, however, is terminated in the soul. For the known must be in the knower according to the mode of the knower."[13] *Adequatio* means correspondence, and a truth that does not "fit" the intellect, i.e., is not compatible with its own constitutive structure, cannot strictly speaking be said to be true.

One might argue that we ought not to view the intellect's structural capacities as constituted prior to and independently of the soul's most proper object, i.e., being itself, in which case the problem of measuring truth by the soul's immanent capacities need never arise. We will return to this promising possibility in a moment, but we ought to recognize the difficulty it still leaves in place, namely, the fact that revelation, though not lying *outside* of being, is nevertheless *qua* supernatural not deducible from the structure of *ens* or even of *esse creatum*. If we insist that it is not created being but rather *Ipsum Esse* that is the first thing to "fall" into the natural

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[12]*De veritate*, 1.1.

[13]*De veritate*, 1.2.

intellect, and thus forms its most proper object, we resolve the problem of the soul's capacity to understand revelation only at the cost of its gratuity.[14] Either way, there is no surprise.[15]

One of the things a more patient eye discerns in these classical epistemologies is a certain open "undecidedness" at the deepest level of the question of reason's relation to its objects. Plato hesitates to insist on any definitive account about the precise "mechanics" of recollection, for example; Aristotle seems to distinguish the intellect that always-already knows all its objects from the individual soul, but does not specify the relationship any further; and Aquinas locates the ultimate and defining adequation of truth, and thus the ultimate measure of both being and in turn the human soul's knowledge of it, in the mind of God and therefore infinitely above the natural powers of the soul. With the new philosophical spirit of the Enlightenment, however, whatever fruitful ambiguities may have lain in these epistemologies get mercilessly cleared away.

Descartes lays down the fundamental principle: ideas are true precisely to the extent that they can be derived from reason itself.[16]

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[14]Moreover, to affirm that we have direct knowledge of God as the foundation for all other knowledge of the world, as this claim implies, would be the problem of ontologism: "Hence it must be said that God is not the first object of our knowledge" (*ST* I, 88, 3).

[15]Indeed, Aquinas clearly affirms the mind's natural desire to know the ultimate cause of things, and insists that this desire cannot be in vain (*ST* I, 12, 1). At the same time, however, Aquinas is equally clear that "in our present life," the mind "has a natural aptitude for material objects," which aptitude the understanding of the Divine Essence necessarily exceeds (*ST* I, 86, 2, ad 1). Still more, he insists that even in the eschaton, the human intellect cannot reach God by its natural powers (*ST* I, 12, 4, ad 5). Aquinas thus affirms that grace—in this case, "created light"—is necessary to bring the intellect beyond its natural powers. (On this, see Gilson's discussion of the disjunction between the intellect's "proper" or "natural object" and its "adequate object" in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940], 248ff.) While all of this is true, it does not yet resolve the problem, but simply defers it: does reason have the capacity to be so raised, without becoming something simply other than it is? This elevation can fulfill natural reason only if the power it adds is in fact proportionate in some way to the natural order of the intelligence, but it must at the same time exceed that order. I propose that the insight we will draw from Balthasar below, namely, that reason is "constitutionally dramatic," provides a way of affirming both necessities.

[16]The clarity and distinctness of ideas that Descartes takes to be the criteria of their truth derive from the immediacy with which they are related to the pure thought of the ego. See part IV of the *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting*

Kant differentiates this principle through an encounter with Humean empiricism into one of history's most sophisticated and comprehensive philosophies. But regarding the question of revelation, Kant's integration of empiricism does not bring him in any significant sense beyond Descartes. Critical philosophy exhaustively determines the subject's conditions of possibility *prior to* any encounter with what lies outside of the subject. Where the soul—as πῶς πάντα—had once been the place of the forms, it now becomes a Procrustean bed. On the one hand, only that which can be received within the understanding's a priori conditions is intelligible. On the other hand, what lies beyond these conditions simply cannot be received. For Kant, the mind is constitutionally lonely.

We see this loneliness specifically in two ways: first of all, everything that is ordered in one's experience, which means everything accessible to the soul's perceptive and cognitive powers, is exhaustively the product of the soul's spontaneous formal and categorial activity; what comes from outside the soul is nothing but the matter to receive this activity—in other words, the "world" is not ultimately what one understands but is rather the mere occasion for understanding.[17] Second, even this incidental contribution from outside the subject disappears at the supersensible level. The soul can "encounter" only what is physical; beyond the physical is nothing but the pure spontaneity of reason. Indeed, the experience of the sublime—which is the moment in Kant's philosophy wherein the supersensible seems to impose itself most insistently—is, strictly speaking, not an experience at all, insofar as experience entails a moment of receptivity. As Kant remarks in the Third Critique, *because* the sublime is infinite, it cannot be encountered anywhere in

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the Reason, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 100–106; here, 102, and the second and third meditations in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in ibid., 149–171.

[17]However provocative this statement may seem at first, it is simply another way of articulating the basic Kantian thesis that the noumena, things in themselves, *cannot be* the proper object of knowledge, and that the formal aspect of the phenomena, which is what constitutes their intelligibility, derives *simply* from the subject's spontaneous activity.

the world, and turns out to be reason's "encounter" with itself.[18] We are reminded of Hölderlin's shock in stirring from a dream in which he believed he was encountering the glory of Nature herself face to face, but woke up alone: "es ist, als fühlt' ich ihn, den Geist der Welt, wie eines Freundes warme Hand, aber ich erwache und meine, ich habe meine eignen Finger gehalten."[19]

What looks like the inbreaking of the radically Other is in fact the moment of the purest introspection. For Kant, reason by its very definition *cannot* be moved by its other. The infinite, which would seem to challenge the soul's a priori conditions of possibility, in the end reinforces them all the more decisively, albeit at a different level. It is therefore no surprise that Kant explicitly affirms the impossibility of genuine supernatural revelation: "it sounds questionable," he says in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, "but it is in no way reprehensible to say that everyone makes his own God."[20] He makes this claim because we would not be able to recognize the revealed God as God unless he corresponded to our a priori notion of what it means to be God. Revelation can be true only if it reveals to us *what we already know*. Here we meet Meno's paradox again, though perhaps in a more ruthless form. For Kant, "revealed" religion has value only insofar as it aids in the understanding of natural religion, which is religion determined by reason's a priori and thus immanent horizon.

Now, although Kant represents an extreme form of the rationalism that necessarily excludes the possibility of an intelligible revelation, I hope that this brief account shows that he in fact simply brings to clear expression a problem left unresolved in many more

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[18]"[T]rue sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person, not in the natural object the judging of which prompts this mental attunement" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987], 113 [Ak. 256]).

[19]Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 1, in: *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 618.

[20]Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Greene and Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 157, n. It is interesting to note that Fichte's first, and anonymous, publication, the *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792), which reduces God's will to reason's own moral law, and allows a "sensuous" revelation only in relation to those whose corrupt nature keeps them from following that law, was initially thought to be written by Kant, and was in any event fully endorsed by him.

classical epistemologies, at least as they are conventionally interpreted, because it is, when all is said and done, simply an extraordinarily difficult philosophical question: how, indeed, can reason have a capacity for what lies beyond its capacity? It should equally be apparent that this question in fact concerns not merely a particular use of reason—i.e., the way reason functions in fundamental theology—but the very nature of reason, and therefore reason in all of its functions, in every single one of its acts: if reason is capable of understanding revelation without destroying its revelational character, it can only be because it is capable in principle of being beyond itself, and this capacity would have implications for all of its activities. Thus, the question of reason in fundamental theology turns out to be a paradigm for the more global question that Rousselot once referred to simply as "the problem of knowledge": "whether and how a being can be conscious of that which is not itself."[21] If this is true, we can see why Balthasar's approach to truth in view of the specifically theological question would also have exciting implications for philosophy in general. Let us now turn to look at this approach directly.

2.

To sketch the basic contours of Balthasar's proposal, we will consider only two governing principles, the mother's smile and the identity of freedom and form in the *Gestalt*, and then see why these principles entail what we might call a "dramatic" structure of truth.

A common response in twentieth-century thought to what is referred to as the Cartesian problem—namely, the difficulty of accounting for the mind's capacity to make contact with the world, which is its "other"—is to dissolve the problem by affirming that consciousness itself is nothing but the world as manifest to me. In other words, the self is always already in contact with the world, and develops its own immanent structures from first to last only from within this contact. If this is indeed the case, the problem of the soul's transcending itself to its other finds a solution even before it

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[21]Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2001), 76.

arises. We find versions of this response, for example, in both Thomism and phenomenology.[22] While in these philosophies, the intention is primarily to preserve (more or less successfully) an epistemological realism, for Balthasar—and indeed for the question of fundamental theology we are considering—the aim goes deeper: namely, to preserve an abiding *otherness* in the completed act of knowledge even within the soul's union with its object. It is possible to argue that this deeper aim is ultimately necessary even for a consistent realism. However that may be, while Balthasar agrees with this typical way of approaching the problem in principle, he roots the soul's contact with the world in a more fundamental "contact," one that gives everything else a particular coloring: namely, the mother's smile. As deceptively simple as it seems, this principle is arguably Balthasar's most significant contribution to philosophy, a contribution still waiting to be appropriated.

"The little child awakens to self-consciousness through being addressed by the love of his mother," Balthasar writes in the first sentence of his essay, "Movement Toward God."[23] The personal gesture that the mother addresses to the child is what gives rise to his capacity to respond in kind. The view of consciousness implied in this exchange differs fundamentally from Kant's insofar as it affirms that the soul's conditions of possibility are not fixed prior to and thus independent of the (receptive) encounter with what is other than consciousness, but instead *occurs* in the encounter. The conditions of possibility arise, as it were, not wholly from below, but as a gift from above, which, precisely *because* of its generosity, creates the space for the "from below" capacity to receive it.[24] In other words, because

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[22]See, for example, Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8–16; cf. Josef Pieper, *Wahrheit der Dinge* (Munich: Kosel Verlag, 1947), 70–71.

[23]Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Movement Toward God," in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3, *Creator Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 15–55.

[24]It is important to note that the child cannot be lacking altogether in a prior capacity to receive the mother's smile—or else the smile would never, in fact, reach him intelligibly. As we will clarify below, there *is* a prior capacity, but this capacity is by its nature a capacity to be surprised, which is to say that the prior capacity *cannot* suffice on its own to account for the possibility of encounter (as it necessarily does in Kant). It is, after all, a capacity that is originally and ontologically receptive: it is received from God, and also from the parents, and the former reception is mediated through the latter.

the mother's smile is a gesture of love that "welcomes" the other, her child, it does not impose itself as an opaque and indeed violent demand, but as an enabling invitation:

> Since, however, the child in this process replies and responds to a directive that cannot in any way have come from within its own self—it would never occur to the child that it itself had produced the mother's smile—the entire paradise of reality that unfolds around the "I" stands there as an incomprehensible miracle: it is not thanks to the gracious favor of the "I" that space and the world exist, but thanks to the gracious favor of the "Thou." And if the "I" is permitted to walk upon the ground of reality and to cross the distances to reach the other, this is due to an original favor bestowed on him, something for which, a priori, the "I" will never find the sufficient reason in himself.[25]

But the mother, through her smile, does not invite the child merely into a personal relationship with her; rather, as the passage just cited suggests, she welcomes him literally into the world, i.e., into reality more generally. Balthasar specifies the gradual unfolding of this event of the awakening of consciousness in an especially dense and endlessly rich section from the fifth volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, called the "miracle of being and the fourfold distinction."[26] While we cannot enter into the complexities of these pages here, we ought nevertheless to extract the salient point in relation to our present concerns. The child's first experience of both self and world in his mother's embrace is *simultaneously* personal and ontological, it is simultaneously historical/phenomenological and metaphysical. Here we see what Balthasar's starting point adds to the common response to the Cartesian problem alluded to above. It is said that the soul does not need to find a bridge to reality, because it is always-already "in" the world, and its self-consciousness develops in tandem with its knowledge of the world. But this response generates the problem from the other direction: if the "bridge" problem is solved by denying the difference—i.e., by *identifying* the self and the other in the act of knowing—one is led to ask how to salvage an abiding *difference*. In other words, reason is *still* in this case incapable of being

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[25]Ibid., 16.

[26]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 5: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 613–627. This is volume 3/2, 2 in the original German edition.

surprised, because it accommodates contact by affirming that the contact has always-already been made. Incidentally, we may suggest that Heidegger's *Ereignis* ends up in the same predicament, insofar as he interprets the essential reciprocal "belonging" together of being and the human essence as consisting ultimately in a nothingness in which all differences are eliminated.[27]

For Balthasar, by contrast, because the original event in which consciousness is constituted is *personal* as well as ontological, the true identity that occurs between the soul and being does so at the very same time within the irreducible and generous opposition of freedoms.[28] Indeed, the difference of the opposition makes the unity possible and vice versa; the unity and difference are inseparable and irreducible aspects of the very same event. Moreover, from the beginning—a beginning which is never more to be left behind—being has a personal face, and the personal always has an ontological depth, or to use Plato's language, love both is and is not "beyond being," because being and love have from the beginning acquired their meaning only in relation to one another.[29] The importance of this simultaneity cannot be overstated; we will return to it below.

The second crucial principle in Balthasar's understanding of truth is the identity of form and freedom in the *Gestalt*. Although he discusses this principle in a separate context, we can see how it follows from the principle we have just described; we might say that it represents the inseparable objective correlate of the awakening of consciousness in the mother's smile. If Balthasar insists on beauty as the starting point for theology (and one might argue also for

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[27]Martin Heidegger, *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1956), 28.

[28]"Opposition," here, is not meant in the negative sense; rather, the word indicates the fact that the two freedoms "face" one another.

[29]Balthasar, following Gustav Siewerth, differs in a subtle, but significant way from Jean-Luc Marion on this point. While Marion characterizes love as "beyond being," or indeed "without being" (cf. *God Without Being* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991]), Balthasar insists that such a self-transcendence is in fact being's highest act. Thus, the transcendence is *not* simply outside of being, but is contained within it; however paradoxical it may seem, being *itself* is "beyond being." On this, see the two important footnotes in *Theologic*, vol. 2*: Truth of God*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 134–135, fn. 10, and 177, fn. 9.

philosophy, though Balthasar sometimes implies otherwise[30]), it is because he thinks of *form* not in the first place as abstract, universal essence, say, but rather paradigmatically as the concrete, brimming *Gestalt*, a visible manifestation of non-appearing depths, in which the particular and the universal, the sensible and the supersensible, the outward and the inward, the historical and the transcendent, are all bound together at once.[31]

This *Gestalt* is intelligible insofar as it possesses an irreducible unity that gathers up its constitutive "parts" or aspects into a meaningful whole, and yet precisely for the same reason, this intelligibility is inescapably concrete. The "meaning" is not simply a concept that the soul abstracts and internalizes "according to the mode of the knower." Rather, as a *manifestation* of meaning, it lies in a decisive way "outside" of the soul, and calls upon the soul to conform itself to *it*, the concrete *Gestalt*. However, the fact that the manifestation of meaning lies in some respect beyond the soul does not make it for all that inaccessible. To the contrary, it *is* accessible, but only to a soul that can be "transported" outside of itself in order to enter into it. The act of understanding, then, requires the soul's self-transcendence, and in this act the difference between spontaneity and receptivity effectively falls away: the soul *receives* the meaning of the *Gestalt* by indwelling it, which means by moving "spontaneously" beyond its prior state—or, if you will, its preconceived expectations.

Although it is principally to Goethe that Balthasar claims he is indebted for his notion of the beautiful, organic *Gestalt*, we might in the present context draw on its connection with Schiller in order to understand why *Gestalt* represents the unity of freedom/spirit and form, and the significance of this unity. In his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller defines beauty as the "living form," that is,

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[30]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 17. In his comment regarding philosophy here, Balthasar clearly has Kant in mind, who treats beauty—and the unity of the sensible and supersensible that it implies—only in his third and final Critique, after having expounded the theoretical and practical philosophies.

[31]See ibid., 117–119.

as the determinate manifestation of freedom.[32] What he means by freedom seems related to the "light" that gives a beautiful form its radiance, insofar as they both indicate a kind of center or ground that, because it is capable of integrating all of the parts of a form into a whole, necessarily transcends those parts. But the connection between freedom and form allows us to see that the *Gestalt* that Balthasar intends here is neither (simply) the Platonic *eidos*, nor the scholastic *forma*; it is not an eternally immobile quantity or quality, not a mere content of the intellect, but includes, for example, the concrete shape of a life or the intelligible wholeness of an action or an event.

Let us return to our prior discussion of the awakening of consciousness as an illustration, and in order to see the implications of this point more concretely. When the mother smiles at her child, she is in fact presenting him with a *Gestalt* in which she makes her person accessible to him as a loving gift. The gesture is not simply an opaque picture, which can adequately be read as it were "off the surface." Instead, the whole has a *meaning* because of "something" that is both not any particular part of what she shows him and at the same time transparently present everywhere within it, namely, *herself*, i.e., her freedom. This freedom is what makes the smile radiant, or in other words genuinely beautiful. The intelligibility of this event is thus grounded in this center that is both above and within the sensible phenomena.

Now, this smile is clearly not merely an image but at the same time a gesture, an action. Because the action, moreover, is a personal address, it can be received only through a reciprocating response. The child has not understood the smile, received its intelligible form, *until* it responds with a smile of its own, or better, only *in* its smiling. The child's smile is the reception of the mother's smile, which means: the child's return gift of freedom is its reception of the mother's gift of the same. What this implies, in turn, is that the ecstatic moment of action is not something that comes simply before or after understanding, but is an intrinsic part of the understanding itself. If it is true, as Aquinas says following Aristotle, that the true is the soul's taking the object into itself while the good is

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[32]See the Fifteenth Letter from the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, in Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 2001), 127–132.

the soul's movement beyond itself toward its object, then for Balthasar these two moments are joined together in beauty, and the true itself—as we will see further on—depends on the soul's ecstatic movement toward the good.[33] All of this follows from identifying the concrete *Gestalt*, rather than simple abstract essence, as the intelligibility sought by understanding.

We are now in a position to see why such a view of the soul's grasp of truth deserves to be called "dramatic."[34] According to Aristotle, the plot of a good drama involves a reversal and a discovery, or we might say a "surprise" and a "resolution."[35] The sequence of events that constitute a drama do not proceed in a merely linear fashion, "one damn thing after another," as someone once wittily described history. Instead, we say that a plot *unfolds*, which makes sense only if the events that constitute the plot possess an intrinsic and intelligible inter-ordering. Such an organic unity, in turn, requires some key turn of events, some moment of decision, which ties together the disparate parts into a meaningful whole. When the drama is successful, this moment takes us by surprise, it evokes astonishment, not only because we sense the fateful significance of the moment, but also because the moment is not simply the mechanical product of the preceding events. At the same time, however, the turn of events is not *merely* a surprise, because it serves to give meaning to the plot as a whole, and thus to bring to light the significance of all the other aspects of the plot. There is a discontinuity that nevertheless preserves a continuity, though that continuity gets recast by the dramatic reversal. In contrast to predominantly

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[33]Anton E. van Hooff is right to insist that the object of fundamental theology is not an abstract idea but a "humano-divine action," and that an object of this sort entails an appropriate method: "Facticité et argumentation: Réflexions sur la méthode en théologie fondamentale," *Recherches de science religieuse* 86, no. 4 (1998): 549–558. Van Hooff draws on Blondel to propose the concrete mediation of action, a solution similar in spirit to the "dramatic" notion of reason we are describing here.

[34]The aspect of drama we elaborate here is only the one that relates directly to the problem at hand, and by no means claims to do justice to the whole of Balthasar's theory. The exceedingly rich diversity of aspects that enter into the dramatic analogy can be found in a long section called "Elements of the Dramatic," in *Theodrama*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 259–478.

[35]Aristotle, *Poetics* 11.

physiological readings of the effects of tragedy, Goethe offered a new interpretation of the mysterious word "catharsis" in Aristotle's famous definition in relation to the objective structure of the plot: it designates, he explains, the resolution of the pity and fear generated by the drama's action, the "untying" of the knot.[36]

Now, in relation to the matter at hand, it is interesting to consider the trajectory of the expectations in the spectacle of drama. In order for there to be a genuine surprise, it is necessary for the prior events to generate a state of anticipation, which means that they must already possess an intelligible form or meaning. At the same time, however, the moment of reversal cannot simply be deducible from the prior events: it has to interrupt the claim, thwart or even shatter the expectations. But—and this is the key—the moment cannot shatter the dramatic form of the whole without undermining the very surprise it initially effected. Instead, this reversal must recast the meaning of the parts and the anticipation they produced in a manner that brings them all to a definitive fulfillment. Here is the great paradox of great drama: anticipation is fulfilled by what it cannot have expected; the turn of events that "shatters" the progressively developing intelligible form ends up crystallizing that very form in a startlingly radiant whole. The form does not become less intelligible by the disruption, but in fact it becomes far more intelligible than one could have anticipated at the outset or along the way.

Drama, thus described, provides a powerful metaphor for the act of knowledge, as Balthasar characterizes it. The paradox of the dramatic recasting of intelligible form would be an affront to the structure of consciousness only if we viewed consciousness as deriving its capacity for the reception of its object solely from within its immanent potentialities, however they may be conceived regarding their details. In this case, the advent of the object to be known must already correspond to the anticipations or else simply have no place of entry. There can be no fundamental surprise within such a perspective; the mind can receive only what it is in some sense already prepared to receive. We could therefore say that,

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[36]See "On Interpreting Aristotle's *Poetics* (1827)," in Goethe, *The Collected Works*, vol. 3: *Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Ellen and Earnest von Nardroff (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 197–199.

according to their usual interpretations, traditional epistemologies are constitutionally undramatic.

The principle of the mother's smile, however, offers a contrast on precisely this point. If it is the case, as Balthasar proposes, that the spontaneous activity of consciousness—i.e., the child's initial human act, his smile—arises as a gift in the reception of his mother's initiating act, then surprise is, as it were, built into the very heart of consciousness. The potential for the reception of the mother's smile does not precede that address as an a priori condition of possibility but arrives *with* that address; it is part of the original gift itself.[37] The child does not expect to be able to respond to his mother before she addresses him, and indeed the capacity to do so is not simply latent within him like a switch waiting to be flipped on. Rather, he finds himself responding to her in the very moment he grasps her address. We can thus affirm the Aristotelian/Thomistic principle that act precedes potency without already anticipating all possible actualities within the soul's immanent capacities, for now the act that precedes potency occurs as an event, a simultaneously immanent and transcendent encounter, in which the soul is already outside of itself in its reception of its other.

We thus break open the paradox that confounded Meno: the soul anticipates its object, but because that object is not derivable from the soul itself, its anticipation gets recast in the encounter, so that its anticipation is simultaneously surprised and fulfilled. In this respect, the strangely satisfying upheaval that one experiences in great drama turns out to be—surprise!—not an exception to the normal act of cognition, but in fact simply a particularly intense instance of what occurs in every act of knowing whatever insofar as every act is the soul's grasping, and being grasped by, what is other than the soul itself.

Moreover, it becomes evident from what has been said that the act of knowledge is never a merely intellectual act. As we saw above, in Balthasar's understanding, the form to be known is not ultimately an abstract essence alone, but a concrete *Gestalt* that necessarily includes, but is not reducible to, its intelligible structure.

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[37]More accurately, as we saw above, we would have to say that the child possesses certain capacities that prepare him, not specifically for the smile, but for the *surprise* that he cannot simply anticipate. The child receives the a priori condition of the possibility of reception.

Here again we see the significance of drama. The soul must move beyond itself to receive its object, that is, to enter into and conform itself to that object. If the soul, then, does not simply take the object into itself according to its prior capacity, its pre-given mode of reception, but truly conforms itself to the object, it must receive the capacity for the object in some sense from the encounter: the movement is initiated by the object. But to respond to this call by the object, the soul cannot be passive (i.e., *merely* receptive), but must actively consent to the movement; it must contribute an act of the will. This spontaneity on the part of the soul, then, is not *merely* spontaneous but is a constitutive aspect of a more comprehensive receptivity. This is why the soul's spontaneity is not an imposition on the object—as it necessarily is, for example, for Kant.[38] But precisely because the spontaneity is an aspect of a more basic receptivity, the active anticipation it entails does not unilaterally determine the object's final meaning. Instead, the expectation is surprised by that meaning, and precisely in the surprise finds its expectation fulfilled, insofar as it sought to know the object—its other—and not merely itself or its own experience. The moment in which the soul moves beyond itself is the moment in which the object finally discloses itself.

The intellectual grasp of meaning thus turns out to be an irreducibly distinct part of a more comprehensive whole, which includes a perceptive, affective, and volitional dimension as well. Here, I believe, we can understand the significance of the order of Balthasar's trilogy: first, the experience of the form which calls forth a response: beauty; then, the will's contribution, the moment of decision and action: the good; finally, the unveiling of the meaning of the whole, which is both anticipated and beyond all expectations: the true.[39] We are generally accustomed to think of the dramatic

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[38]It is for this reason, in fact, that Kant posits an absolute distinction between noumena and phenomena: taking for granted that the understanding effectively constructs its object, Kant avoids idealism by insisting that we do not in fact know the thing itself, but only our experience of it: see *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 40–41.

[39]On this, see the section entitled "Dramatic Theory between Aesthetics and Logic," in *Theodrama*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena*, 15–23. The notion that, at the center of revelation lies not *merely* an aesthetic/intelligible form, but in fact a *deed*, and thus that dramatic engagement lies at the center of the response to revelation, suggests

moment in Balthasar's work as specifically theological, that is, as the encounter of divine and human freedom. But if this moment itself is to be at all intelligible, we must understand that every cognitional act—insofar as it involves the advent of a meaning that includes the soul's capacity without being reducible to it—is something like an encounter between two freedoms. There is, in other words, from the outset an analogy between the theological and the properly philosophical act, and indeed between the act of faith and every use of the intellect, even the most rudimentary.

3.

Let us now return to the problem of fundamental theology with which we began. In order to affirm its genuine gratuity, revelation must be in some basic sense discontinuous with the demands of human thought. But in order to affirm the integrity of reason and its natural aspiration to ultimacy, there must be some continuity between reason in its "natural" functions and reason in its grasp of revealed truth. *Prima facie*, we seem to be facing a straightforward contradiction: how can discontinuity and continuity be anything but mutually exclusive? But we cannot resolve the problem of fundamental theology unless we can affirm both at the same time, and we cannot affirm both unless we have a dramatic understanding of truth as the foundation not only for fundamental theology, but for all thinking.

The simultaneity of continuity and discontinuity is the very definition of drama.[40] The event of revelation—and we might say the advent of grace, the moment of the act of faith—can take reason

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the possible inadequacy of a merely aesthetic approach: see, for example, David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

[40]And we might add that it is also the very essence of analogy as defined by Lateran IV: similarity within a greater dissimilarity. The line of argument in this paper suggests, indeed, that a proper view of analogy requires a dramatic sense of truth, and that drama might therefore provide a test for analogy in one's thinking: to what extent does one simply carry over some aspect of one's thinking from one term to the other (univocally) without an intrinsic reversal? The doctrine of analogy reveals the inadequacy of the view that insists on "clarifying concepts" philosophically, and then applying them within theology.

wholly by surprise, even shatter its expectations, demand a rethinking of everything it previously thought from top to bottom, and yet remain perfectly rational, or indeed show itself to be even more intensely rational, on one condition only: that it is the very nature of reason in its normal, everyday constitution, to be taken by surprise. If this is the case, then on the one hand no matter how discontinuous revelation is with respect to the "horizon of human reason," no matter how radically surprising, it will represent a fulfillment of what reason is by nature. Insofar as reason in its natural functions aspires to know what is other than itself, it expects to be "overturned" to some degree—as slight as the reversal may happen to be in ordinary circumstances—by the object it seeks to know. And in aspiring to ultimacy, it naturally aspires to be overturned by what is ultimate.[41] On the other hand, this reversal, though it corresponds in some respect to the nature of reason, is in no way reducible to the immanent structure of reason, because what reason itself demands is in fact the priority of its irreducibly other: in the natural order, it is the priority of the object to be known, and in the supernatural order, it is the priority of faith. There is thus something analogous to faith operating in every act of reason, which is precisely why its being surprised by faith is a perfection of its nature.[42] Faith corresponds, we might say, by not corresponding.

Moreover, the same paradox explains how Christianity can lay claim to the assent of reason, can lay claim, in fact, to the very roots of reason, while at the same time arriving as a sheer gift of grace. Understood dramatically, the inner spontaneity of consciousness is constituted in the advent of a gift, namely, the mother's smile. If this is the case, the advent of revelation, as a gift from above, recapitulates the constitutive aspiration of reason and in this sense directly "speaks to" reason in its most inward core precisely as an unanticipated event.

This simultaneity has two further implications. First of all, at the outset of this paper, we insinuated that far from being difficult to reconcile, the integrity of reason in its encounter with revelation and

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[41]Here we see an epistemological version of the paradoxical relationship between nature and grace that de Lubac articulated in his interpretation of Aquinas: the human being naturally desires something that surpasses human nature, namely, the supernatural invitation to share in God's triune life. See *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

[42]According to Aquinas, "All knowing beings know God implicitly in whatever they know," *De veritate*, 22, 2, ad 1.

the gratuity of revelation *require* one another, so that we cannot affirm either without affirming both. To the extent that reason aims at understanding, it aims at attaining an object that is in some sense other than itself. There is therefore some degree of self-transcendence demanded of reason for the completion of its most basic acts. But such a self-transcendence requires a moment of discontinuity and therefore gratuity. In this respect, the encounter with revelation turns out to be, not a limit question that can be attended to *after* reason has figured out how knowledge of the world is possible, but the paradigm that is approximated in all of its acts. Thus, the gratuity of revelation is intrinsic to, constitutive of, the integrity of reason, whether it be the revelation of being in its natural self-disclosure or the revelation of the triune God in history.

On the other hand, revelation can be gratuitous, that is, it can be a surprise, only in relation to a reason that in fact aspires to ultimacy, and that means only in relation to an integral conception of reason. Surprise *requires* expectation. One can impose oneself from the outside, "from above," on an inanimate object, but one cannot surprise it. If we think of the constitutive aspiration of reason from the beginning in dramatic terms, we no longer need to affirm an inverse relation between expectation and surprise. To the contrary, the deeper one's anticipations, the greater one's capacity for surprise. As Heraclitus said long ago, "Whoever does not expect will not discover the unexpected" (DK 18). The gratuity of revelation in some sense "depends on" the integrity of reason.

The second implication concerns the operation of reason within the revealed order, within theology itself. We typically think of the problem of the encounter between reason and revelation as essentially a "bridge" problem: can reason appropriate revelation, and if so, how? The terms in which this problem is articulated prepares what may be an even more serious difficulty once the problem finds its resolution. If reason *can* appropriate revelation, does its appropriation eliminate the gratuity and thus render revelation mundane?[43] Is it therefore the case that what we under-stand of

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[43]"L'assunzione del *novum*, non si limita al dato rivelato, ma prosegue nella sua stessa comprehensione che si sviluppa nel corso dei secoli" [Appropriation of the *novum* does not stop at what has been revealed, but continues as it is more deeply understood through the centuries] (R. Fisichella, "Oportet Philosophari in Theologia (II)," *Gregorianum* 76, no. 3 [1995]: 503–534; here, 528).

revelation has now entered into the immanent system of rational necessity, while we can yet be surprised only by what has not yet been appropriated? If this is the case, faith is a reality only *in via*, and just so far a provisional imperfection that will be eliminated *in fine*. But St. Paul affirmed faith as one of the three theological virtues that "will abide." Once again, the significance of a dramatic sense of truth becomes apparent. We need only oppose faith and reason if we interpret reason wholly in terms of immanent potentialities and conditions of possibility. In this case, reason can appropriate only by eliminating the "otherness" of its object. If reason is constituted dramatically, by contrast, the more it internalizes, the more it is expropriated and joyfully immersed in a luminous mystery.[44] Faith therefore need never lose its character of surprise in theology, even in the most rigorous and penetrating of rational reflection. It is not, then, only the apologist's dialogue partner who ought to expect to be surprised, but also and first of all the theologian himself.

In conclusion, let us consider a possible objection from the philosophical side: while we may have articulated a notion of reason that can accommodate the demands of theology, someone could argue, we have done so at the cost of severing any continuity with the philosophical tradition. In other words, can we really claim to do justice to reason's demands if, after all, we have to formulate what seems to be a novel conception of reason precisely in order to meet those demands?[45] I propose that this objection can itself be answered *dramatically*. While the vision of reason we can distill from Balthasar's work does indeed present a certain novelty, and therefore discontinuity, with respect to the philosophical tradition, it also turns out to confirm that tradition, to recast the epistemologies of previous thinkers in a way that fulfills them. This fulfillment is perhaps easiest to see with respect to Aristotle and Aquinas: we can affirm that truth is the actualization of a prior potentiality in the soul while insisting that this potentiality is nevertheless in some sense a gift of the truth itself and likewise affirm that truth is an "adequation" between the

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[44]"Finally the knowledge faith offers does not destroy the mystery. Rather it makes it more evident and proves it to be almost a necessary element in human life" (*FR*, 13).

[45]Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P., raises just such an objection against Balthasar in "Balthasar's Method of Divine Naming," *Nova et Vetera* 1, vol. 2 (2003): 245–268.

mind and thing while insisting that the capacity for adequation is given in part by the thing.

But is the dramatic notion of truth simply the opposite of Kant's epistemology? In fact, from a dramatic perspective, we can affirm, with Kant, that the immanent structures of reason and the understanding possess conditions of possibility that establish, so to speak, the horizon *within which* truth takes place, but we must insist on the proper understanding of a horizon. As Hegel argued in response to Kant, a horizon can exist only in relation to what lies beyond it; its limits are defined in a decisive sense by what lies beyond those limits. It is true that there can be no understanding without a "predetermined" limit or horizon because limit and definition are essential to order. But it is the very nature of a limit not to be the final word; the notion of limit itself is unintelligible without the open space into which it is projected—the open space of transcendence and therefore surprise. Revelation, we might say, does not obliterate or ignore the human horizon. Rather, we might better conceive it as the in-breaking of dawn, which needs the world's horizon, and in fact gives that horizon a sharper definition than it could possibly have had at night. Grace will often arrive with a certain irony.

What seems to be the limit between two disciplines turns out to lie close to the center of each. The engagement with fundamental theology becomes an occasion to develop a notion of truth with profound and wide-ranging significance not only for theology, but perhaps even more directly for philosophy. It is a particularly precious occasion in an age that is witnessing a growing contempt for reason and a growing disillusionment regarding its capacity to know. Among the many gifts we have received from the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, born a hundred years ago, those of us who work in philosophy may be especially grateful for this one. □

D. C. SCHINDLER *is assistant professor of philosophy in the department of Humanities and Augustinian Traditions at Villanova University in Philadelphia.*