TELEOLOGY AND TRANSCENDENCE: THE THOUGHT OF ROBERT SPAEMANN

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"In conversation he said that, ultimately, he had only one wish: *that God is God*—even if he felt that, with the psalmist, we can also occasionally remind God that he ought to be God."

It is only after the end of someone's life that we can take a look at his life as a whole—Robert Spaemann did not think this possible during one's lifetime. Nevertheless, even during one's lifetime, every part of it is already informed by the viewpoint of an ungraspable whole into which it transcends itself. Now that Robert Spaemann's life has come to an end, it can come into view as a whole, and we can try to identify some of the basic themes that unify its parts: "teleology" and "transcendence" offer themselves, and the critique of misguided attempts to replace them with a paradigm of self-preservation.

Spaemann's early life might have predisposed him toward self-transcendence, but also toward strong survival instincts. For both can be the result of the exposure and vulnerability to which

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orphans are subject. Spaemann lost his mother to illness at the age of nine, and his father shortly after that to the priesthood (or at least that is how it felt to him initially). He was handed around in the extended family in Swabia and Cologne, all the while experiencing the dangers of the Nazi period. He witnessed the war: during the bombing of Cologne in 1942 he helped carry his dead neighbors out of their houses, and toward the end he saw the annihilation of Dorsten, where he lived.[1] He felt that there was never a place in his life that he could call his home. His home was a space of transcendence—That Which Always Is—which he knew from the chant of the monks of Gerleve in his childhood, and which he experienced when he heard, in a sudden lull during the bombing of Cologne, the nightingales sing in the dark.[2] The vulnerability of his childhood led to a certain kind of courage (though learned by experience[3]) and later to a certain kind of alertness to his environment that always gave him a sense of what would happen next in contemporary culture. In his early days, it led him to discover in a very short time what was happening in Auschwitz. The way in which many others chose *not* to know this he considered paradigmatic for the state in which we are not fully awake to reality, a state that, as we will see, is contrary to an ethical and happy life. Later, he was one of the most alert and knowledgeable observers of contemporary culture—even though he was a bit of a Luddite and never had a TV, nor an answering machine; he did not drive a car and never got accustomed to computers. And though he continued to have his own survival fears (he was afraid of flying, and horrified by the thought of torture), he was one of the most courageous, upright, and outspoken intellectuals of Germany.

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1. Including Allied pilots hunting farmers who worked in their fields—presumably the same ones that were hiding Jews. The best source for his life is his *Über Gott und Welt: Eine Autobiographie in Gesprächen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2012). All otherwise unattributed citations in this essay will be by Robert Spaemann.

2. "In two minutes we will all be dead, but the nightingales will still sing" (35).

3. He recalled the experience of not offering a Jew his seat on the tram, after the latter had been made to get up by a Nazi, a failure that he always regretted (40).

TELEOLOGY *AS* TRANSCENDENCE

While he was concerned mostly with ethical questions, for Spaemann ethics could never be divorced from metaphysics. The metaphysics in question was concerned with the teleology that we find in reality, and which allows us to make our home in the world. His book *Die Frage Wozu?*[4] is an attempt at rehabilitating the Aristotelian notion of final causality against naturalistic reductionism. Only now, decades later, is he joined by authors like Edward Feser and David Oderberg, mostly in the field of analytical philosophy. Spaemann's own formulation, though, is influenced primarily by the history of continental thought.[5] From his teacher Joachim Ritter he had learned to approach topics and concepts as an ongoing historical conversation and through their "*Wirkungsgeschichte*" (Gadamer). He was, with Ritter and Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of the editors of the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*.[6] Accordingly, his own thought on final causality was influenced not only by Aristotle, but also by Leibniz, Kant, German Idealism, Phenomenology, and very many other sources; an early inspiration for this topic was Leo Strauss.

Teleology is related to transcendence in more than one way. The denial of teleology as a refusal of our self-transcendence toward nature (as something with purposes of its own) is one topic that will make his discussion different from what is prevalent in contemporary discussions of final causality. This topic is also not present in Aristotle himself, but comes from the context of modern philosophy.

More closely related to Aristotle is the notion of self-transcendence that characterizes the way in which final causality contributes to the intelligibility of motion. Any motion is a

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4. Robert Spaemann and Reinhard Löw, *Die Frage Wozu? Geschichte und Wiederentdeckung des teleologischen Denkens* (München/Zürich: Piper, 1981); literally "The Question Whither?," now called "*Natürliche Ziele*" (Natural Goals).

5. Though he did not ignore analytical philosophers, he liked to quote David Wiggins's notion of "sortal terms." He also read Quine, Strawson, and other analytical thinkers with his doctoral students, and engaged Davidson and Putnam in person.

6. The contribution of a peculiarly German sense of historicality and the renewed version of Rudolf Eisler's 1904 dictionary, but without the neo-Kantian bias.

motion toward something, but different kinds of things gravitate toward different terms. These terms are specific to their nature; they are their final cause or telos. Now any telos as a telos is something that is yet to be attained; by its telos, a thing is, to speak with Heidegger, "ahead of itself in the future." It is something upon which it is "intent," and toward which it transcends itself. Accordingly, the phenomenon of *intentionality* was important to Spaemann (and the topic of one of his doctoral seminars). In this particular context, his interest was primarily in phenomena of *life*,[7] characterized by a spontaneous drive (*Trieb*) toward something. Importantly, any such drive involves transcendence as a form of *negativity*. If an animal is hungry for, and intent on its prey, then this state is characterized by a certain *absence* that the intention is meant to fill, and which defines its "conditions of satisfaction" (Searle). Hunger and pain are teleological experiences precisely in so far as they are characterized by this negativity. Such negativity cannot be understood in materialistic terms. Matter just *is*, it is something positive. Negativity opens up a space of interiority that is not like that of a material container but like that of consciousness; it is the emergence of subjectivity and selfhood.[8] Even plants as living things define themselves over against their environment by such intentionality as growth and nutrition; it is their particular form of interiority and selfhood. They are unified by it in such a way that the whole that they are is more than the material parts can account for. Unification points to an underlying simplicity. As such, the emergence of life is an instance of simplicity rather than complexity. In this simplicity, life transcends its material conditions, for matter is not simple but extended and cannot account for its own unification.

Intentionality also opens up a space of *possibilities*. For only things that are intent on something can also go wrong. While inorganic nature might also be characterized by teleology, we do not typically talk about rocks and atoms making mistakes. But animals do make mistakes, and sometimes they pay with their life. They do not achieve their telos. This space of possible

7. For Spaemann, life is the paradigm of being; reality is biomorphic; *vivere viventibus est esse*.

8. E.g., Robert Spaemann, *Personen. Versuche über den Unterschied zwischen "etwas" und "jemand"* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), 50–70.

success and failure is the space of incipient freedom. It is only on the background of such freedom that we can then turn around and understand the rest of nature in deterministic ways. Following Bergson, Spaemann will point out that the definition of necessity and determinism can only be made intelligible as a negation of alternate possibilities. Hence in the modal logic of these terms, it is possibility which is primary, not necessity. Without freedom from determinism, we would not have any notion of determinism.[9]

But even non-living things have a form of intentionality. Without such intentionality, motion and causality become unintelligible. The regularities in nature are the regularities of the inclinations and propensities of particular kinds of things, atoms and molecules. As such, regularities are not, as David Hume thought, indicators of efficient causalities, but of final causalities. Though without them, efficient causes indeed become unintelligible, because the effects of efficient causes are singled out from all the facts of the world as effects only with reference to the propensities of the cause.[10] Bertrand Russell accordingly eliminated *both* final and efficient causes as mere anthropomorphism and reduced the intelligibility of motion to mathematical functions. Spaemann thought this would not work. Aristotle had already pointed out that mathematics and geometry do not explain motion, because they are causally inert and do not explain why motion obeys these structures.[11] Spaemann, who frequently held semester-long lectures on Leibniz (still unpublished), recalled that Leibniz already knew about the Zenonian paradoxes of describing motion by calculus, i.e., as a sequence of infinitesimal stages, each of which is not in motion, but static. For Leibniz, each instant is intelligible as instant of motion only because it contains a force (*conatus*) that points beyond itself to its future unfolding. Leibniz rightly associated this force with Aristotelian final causality.

It is on this background of propensities and motion that the "selfhood" and nature of particular kinds of things emerges.

9. Ibid., 225f.

10. Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 86 and 248.

11. Ibid., 31.

While things move and change, they remain the same kind of things, whose nature structures that motion. Change requires something that does not change in its nature or essence; essential predicates do not change and need to be treated logically differently from accidental predicates (contrary to modern symbolic logic).[12]

This unchanging identity and nature of things is not self-enclosed but has its own kind of self-transcendence: all things participate in being, while *differentiating themselves from each other.* Identity and Otherness go together. In this way, they anticipate the relational feature of persons, as we will see below. Earlier, Spaemann pursued with us, his students, the topic of *Ähnlichkeit* ("similarity") in a doctoral seminar—a topic that promised to mediate identity and otherness. Bertrand Russell famously noted that nominalists need at least the notion of similarity as a final universal. For Spaemann, this universal of similarity was not so much a genus, but akin to the notion of being itself, and the differences among beings would be accounted for according to the analogy of being. Toward the end of his life, however, he thought that this was a mistake. He hoped that someone else would pursue a more pertinent paradigm, in which similarity is understood in terms of nearness and distance (*Nähe und Ferne*). We find such relationships among spatial things as well as measurements and in the order of numbers, but also in genealogies and personal relationships such as love and friendship. Absolute closeness would not be nearness but identity, absolute distance would be non-existence (at least spatially: if something is infinitely far away from us then it does not exist; any distance is a definite distance).[13]

It is in this way that things can be themselves, yet related to the rest of reality and defined in relationship to it. They will actively maintain their specific shape of life over against the rest of the world: even atoms maintain their identity and cohesion by

12. Ibid., 28–31; Spaemann disliked set theory for similar reasons; it is harmful to education, which should teach how to distinguish important from unimportant features (or essential from inessential ones). Set theory groups its elements regardless (including in Sesame Street's "One of these things is not like the others, One of these things just doesn't belong").

13. "Nähe und Ferne," January 25, 2013, http://kath.net/news/39816.

enormous amounts of energy (which is released in nuclear power stations[14]). Organisms act in autopoietic ways by self-repair (like a doctor curing himself) or in self-production (as if a ship were to build itself). Natural things are also not the product of others as in the *making* of an artifact but are brought forth by natural things of their own kind in *generation* (whereas artifacts like pianos do not produce other pianos). Evolution theory needs to *presuppose* these structures of reproduction and is therefore unable to explain them.[15]

In all such things, final causality operates similar to a habit in our nature: a piano player has the habitual skill of playing the piano—which means he can do it without much thought; the perfect artist does not need to think.[16] As such, final causes and purposes do precisely *not* presuppose consciousness, contrary to common assumptions. They are "second nature" to us. Pascal suggests that what second nature is in us, might be "first nature" in natural things; and that is exactly what Aristotle thought.[17]

But when does nature *practice* these habits? In ourselves, we find them to be present, before we awake to consciousness and before we practice piano or other things. Likewise natural things, in their first nature, do what they do before they can "practice" it (short of an infinite regress). For Aquinas, unlike for Aristotle, the teleological nature must therefore again be preceded by another conscious action of *making*, namely that of God, who gives them their direction (Aquinas's "fifth way").[18] Spaemann preferred Aristotle. Perhaps he was, with Heidegger, worried about the onto-theology of a divine maker overshadowing the primordial role of Being as preceding thought and ethics as

14. Spaemann hints at the possibility that this split could almost be *contra naturam*; for various reasons, he thought there ought to be a constitutional prohibition against nuclear power; *Nach uns die Kernschmelze; Hybris im atomaren Zeitalter* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2011), 38.

15. Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 68f.

16. Ibid., 85; *Personen*, 147.

17. "Natur," in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Hermann Krings, Hans Michael Baumgartner, and Christoph Wild, vol. 2 (Munich: Kösel, 1973), 956–69, at 959.

18. Indeed, even practicing would presuppose a conscious mind that can distinguish between success and failure so as to reinforce the success.

the condition of its possibility.[19] Also, the first anti-teleological arguments are indeed *theological* in nature: the nominalists, having eviscerated nature of universals and of natural kinds with their natural "habits," could place such teleology *only* in the mind of God; they were willing to denounce anything else as idolatry. But since the mind of God is inaccessible to us, all that is left to us is to posit our own practical purposes independently from any features of reality.[20]

It is here that the other feature of self-transcendence and teleology comes into play: imposing our purposes on nature as an object of our making is a failure to allow nature to be what it is in itself. This is the real reason for abandoning final causes since Bacon and Descartes. Motion in nature is reduced to locomotion, precisely because it is the only form of change that is subject to our manipulation.[21] The ensuing technological domination of nature is motivated by a desire to secure humanity's survival. Nature in turn is interpreted exclusively in such terms: Darwin's survival of the fittest as *explanans* is just one expression thereof; for Spinoza, inertial motion and the very individuation of entities are interpreted in these terms of self-preservation.

Now self-preservation is indeed part of the teleological structure of things. Modern biologists often have recourse to the notion of "teleonomy" in order to avoid the obvious consequence that there must be final causes in nature, if nature after all "strives" for survival. "Teleonomy" attempts to make even this into a mere *façon de parler*,[22] i.e., something merely *for us*, not in nature itself.

For Spaemann, on the other hand, this would make nature in itself unintelligible (including the individuation of its entities, as Spinoza noted). Moreover, the teleology of mere

19. Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 84f. Spaemann also was not much interested in the *universal* teleology of the cosmos that Aquinas inherited from the Stoics. Such grasps at the whole always meet his hesitation, as we will see; cf. ibid., 80–82.

20. Ibid., 94–100.

21. Ibid., 58 and 101f. Sociologically, those who work on nature and the theorists/scientists are now the same class (and not slaves and peasants as opposed to scholars); theory is fused with the utility of praxis (ibid., 104).

22. Ibid., 218.

survival is not enough. What is needed is a teleology of self-transcendence, not mere self-preservation. Aristotle distinguishes survival from the good life, "*zen*" from "*eu zen*."[23] Life is about more than surviving it. Life's end is not just the avoidance of the end of life. In human beings, for example, the good and indeed the best life is a life of contemplation or *theoria*: the self-forgetful (and hence self-transcendent) contemplation of first causes. Or, since not everyone has the leisure to do so, it is the political life, i.e., a life appropriate to a being that has reason and language and is thereby capable of self-transcending friendship, including in its political form.[24]

Contrast this with Francis Bacon, for whom knowledge is not contemplation, but merely instrumental to survival, and a form of power. Or with Thomas Hobbes, who sees friendship not as a form of fulfillment, but of added powers, and the political life exclusively as instrumental to the survival of its members.[25] Even virtue as a form of human flourishing (and hence "eu zen") is explained by Telesio and Campanella as instrumental to self-preservation.

This outlook is characteristic of the bourgeois age, but it can also rightly be called a "slave morality." Hegel would agree with Nietzsche in this assessment: the master-slave distinction emerges from a struggle over life and death in which the master becomes the master not because he is stronger, but because he has not feared death. The slave becomes the slave because he was afraid for his life and therefore is henceforth tied to the conditions of its preservation. For the slave it is true that "he who wants to save his life will lose it." Tyranny feeds on our fear of death, and freedom is gained only by those who are willing to "fear their bad life more than death" (Brecht).

Now if we make survival the *ultimate* telos, then we have nothing left to explain *why* we should desire our survival. Since this desire disappears with our death, there does not seem any-

23. Spinoza, e.g., collapses both: "*per realitatem et perfectionem idem intelligo*"; see *Reflexion und Spontaneität. Studien über Fénelon* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963), 53.

24. E.g., "Nature," 957.

25. Though he has no argument against the escaping prisoner and the deserter, if they can make it.

thing intrinsically wrong with our non-existence. We did not exist before our conception either, and that thought does not bother us much. Nor can murder be a form of violence, because it eliminates both the life and the desire for it at once.[26] Schopenhauer indeed did not think that our survival (or our individuation) was desirable, but rather its Buddhist denial. As Spaemann liked to point out, modern advocates of euthanasia often think likewise, when suffering (an apparent lack of "eu zen") can only be eliminated together with the life of the sufferer. Thus it is not that survival as a telos would not be in need of further justification by a further telos. Without this justification, everything else in this view collapses.

Aristotle, on the other hand, is clear: there is a further telos. The *actus primus* of existence is for the sake of the secondary acts in which we unfold our nature: *omne ens est propter suam propriam operationem*. Survival is for the sake of the good and flourishing life, "zen" for "eu zen."[27] The modern outlook, in turning this around, is what Spaemann calls an "inversion of teleology," or—with a phrase he liked to borrow from Adorno and Horkheimer[28]—"the subordination of life under the conditions of its preservation."

The modern understanding also implies a different understanding of telos or "end." Ends are limits of some sort. Survival is defined by death as an end (to be avoided); i.e., it defines life with regard to the limit between being and non-being—a stark, univocal understanding of being. *Eu zen* as telos, on the other hand, implies that life can be good or better, more or less actualized; here, being is understood analogously. This end, too, envisions a limit, but it is not the limit between being and non-being, but between act and potency. *Eu zen* defines the shape of a

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26. *Glück und Wohlwollen. Versuch über Ethik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989), 125.

27. Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 88; Plato likewise says that the good life (as that which is "friendly," *philon*) is not for the sake of survival (need), but the other way around (ibid., 78, Anm 44). The Nazi slogan "*Kraft durch Freude*" would illustrate the opposite.

28. Their "Dialectics of the Enlightenment," which Spaemann discovered very early on, contrasted this with adoration (*Anbetung*) and self-forgetful, ecstatic self-transcendence into the immediacy of nature (they have the sexual act in mind). Both will be important for Spaemann as well.

thing, its nature, by delineating its contours over against the rest of reality—a reality in which it is a limited way of being.

As fully actualized, our life is virtuous. Aristotle understands virtue as a middle between two extremes, i.e., two limit cases between which the shape of a succeeding life emerges as higher than both extremes. Each of the extremes would destroy this shape.[29] The hypochondriac survival paradigm (Nietzsche calls Spinoza "consumptive," *schwindsüchtig*) might be one of those extremes, as we will see. Plato calls it "the theory of the joyless."[30]

Moreover, if the very being of a thing is a delimited way of being, then this directs even the preservation of bare life toward self-transcendence: for this delimited way of being points us to the *unlimited* act of being of God, in which we "part-icipate", i.e., partake. Accordingly, for Aristotle self-preservation is not just for itself, but is a participation in the everlasting life of God in the way of a particular nature. We desire our continued existence because it is in this way that we emulate the unending existence of the first being.[31] The middle ages will see the very act of existence as a limited *representation* of unlimited being[32] and as a response to God's creative act of efficient causality, whose final cause is his own *bonum* as *diffusivum sui*.[33] Existence itself is unintelligible without final causality and a self-transcendence that culminates in an encounter with its source, i.e., in a lived experience of that nearness and distance that characterizes all being.

NATURE AND VIOLENCE

If the self-preserving domination of nature is the telos and motivation of modern science, then anti-teleology emerges as yet another form of the refusal for self-transcendence: Denying final

29. E.g., "Aufhalter und letztes Gefecht," in *Das Ende. Figuren einer Denkform*, ed. Karlheinz Stierle and Rainer Warning (*Poetik und Hermeneutik* 16) (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1996), 564–77, at 564f.

30. Plato, *Lysis*; Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 72.

31. Spaemann quotes Aristotle, *De Anima* II, 4.

32. Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 74f.

33. Ibid., 87.

causes in nature means to deny the distinction between natural motion and violent motion. The denial defines nature in such a way that violence cannot be done to it. Hence, we do not need to transcend our own, anthropocentric interest in such a way that we would need to take the interests and purposes of nature itself into account. For nature has interests and purposes only if it has a telos that it pursues. Only relative to this telos can we understand violence as the frustration of this telos, and freedom as its fulfilment (all the way down to the "free fall" of inanimate objects). Violence, freedom, normality, and even chance coincidences (*Zufall*) are teleological concepts.[34]

Only if there are purposes in nature are there ethical limits for what we can do. It is in the name of this sense of nature or *physis* that the ancient Greeks began to question wrong traditions and *nomoi*. But this source of criticism remains valid also in the face of contemporary cultural or ethical relativism, which can be just as violent. Throughout his life, Spaemann critiqued a long list of such violations, including the non-natural, violent motions of euthanasia, abortion, artificial insemination (by nature we are begotten, not made[35]), or the brain death criterion.[36] With Adorno and Horkheimer, Spaemann knew that the initial objectification of nature, aiming at the self-preservation of the human race, was eventually applied to human nature as well. The human subject was objectified in the same way as external nature. After teleology in nature had been denounced as an anthropomorphism, man eventually became "an anthropomorphism unto himself."

Here is where the anthropocentrism of the modern age turns against itself. It is in this sense that Spaemann suggests that anthropomorphism is better than anthropocentrism: anthropo-

34. Ibid., 40f., 253, and 62. We speak of chance coincidences only where they fulfill a telos; otherwise we do not notice them at all, they are "nothing" (here, Spaemann liked to quote Karl Valentin).

35. See, for example, "Genetic Manipulation of Human Nature in the Context of Human Personality," in *Human Genome, Human Person and Society of the Future*, ed. J. Vial Correa and E. Sgreccia (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999); and "Is Every Human Being a Person?" *The Thomist* 60, no. 3 (July 1996): 463–74.

36. E.g., "Is Brain Death the Death of a Human Person?," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 326–40.

morphism honors nature as another self, anthropocentrism denigrates nature into means for our ends.

But turned against itself, as anthropomorphism unto itself, this anthropocentrism comes to nothing. For Nietzsche, even the very individuation of nature as a thing in itself is an anthropomorphic projection. But if we end up being "an anthropomorphism to ourselves," then this projection does not have any source; you cannot give what you do not have. "[F]or those who are not real to themselves, nothing is real."[37] There are only subjective experiences, but nothing which they are about or anyone who has them.[38]

Accordingly, humanity started to see itself as the mere passive intersection of causal influences ("I am not motivated"), be it in neurophysiology, sociology or psychology; and the scientific community that makes these observations is just as anonymous as that which it observes. At the same time, the human subject became the object of technological machinations, from the advertisement of the "culture industry" (Adorno) to genetic manipulation. The very telos of human survival, for the sake of which nature was subjected, has now become unintelligible, opaque and *naturwüchsig*. Its motivation can be made transparent by a hermeneutics of suspicion to such an extent that nothing normative, no telos is left to see. It is in this sense that Spaemann liked to quote C. S. Lewis: "a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To 'see through' all things is the same as not to see."[39] Indeed, evolution theory and other hermeneutics of suspicion cannot even account for their very own truth claims. For they can be nothing else than what this suspicion says, i.e., not true; evolution selects for survival, not for truth.[40]

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37. This might explain Buddhism's attractiveness: it teaches a way to become just as unreal to ourselves as the others are to us. Individuation is an illusion.

38. "Wirklichkeit als Anthropomorphismus," in *Was heißt "wirklich"? Unsere Erkenntnis zwischen Wahrnehmung und Wissenschaft* (Waakirchen-Schaftlach: Oreos, 2000), 13–34.

39. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, in *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics* (New York: Harper, 2002), 689–730, at 730. Oddly, the German translation is more striking: *wer alles durchschaut, sieht nichts*.

40. E.g., Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 257f.

The only way to avoid this dialectic is to recall and remember the nature that precedes all our conscious choices as its foundation; nature is that which we have not made.[41] It is to allow nature, against all violence, the freedom to be itself; it is not an emancipation *from* nature, but *of* nature.[42] It is for this reason that Spaemann had strong environmentalist leanings, advocating for the protection of natural species, opposing animal experimentation, genetic manipulation of natural organisms, and nuclear power. This brought him into the neighborhood of the German Green Party, who, for that reason, was for a while willing to listen when he explained to them that it does not make sense to oppose genetic engineering of embryos, while making these same embryos subject to the choice of abortion.[43] His opposition to nuclear power had many reasons (most especially what he saw as the frivolous imposition of and burden on future generations), but a strong theme was the endangering of nature as the necessary background for and condition of the possibility of human conscious choices. If this background, which is not of our making, is endangered as a whole by nuclear disaster, then our making turns against its own presuppositions. Hence he argues (in some way like Hans Jonas) for a tutiorism in decisions in which the conditions of the possibility of future decisions are themselves at stake. The history of modern science and technology exhibits many dialectics that make this necessary: the very technologies developed for our survival now threaten the survival of the whole planet with nuclear and chemical weapons or destructive environmental side effects. None of this was on the horizon of the ancient world, in which nature was thought of as an eternal and unchangeable background.

Whether one agrees with his particular applications or not, it is a principle that is at play in much of Spaemann's thought. It is also at the bottom of his account of the *natural law*, which also appeals to nature as a foundation that precedes our conscious choices. Natural law, in spite of what has been said earlier, does

41. "Nature," 957.

42. Ibid., 965–68.

43. *Kernschmelze*, 76f.

not immediately need to imply an appeal to God. The notion of nature in the Aristotelian sense is sufficient. And in arguing with the modern world it is sometimes better to be a methodological atheist. This is one of the reasons that Spaemann liked to call upon the atheist philosopher Philippa Foot and her notion of "natural goodness." There is normativity in nature such that it is not made but presupposed by our choices and provides the foundation for all further considerations:

> Conscious action only takes place as a secondary appropriation or rejection of tendencies that have, first, a character of instinctive impulse. We are not stones that will and act; we are living beings that will and act. The decision to eat or fast is simply the conscious appropriation or rejection of that which is forewarned in hunger, and also somehow in the way of "tending-toward." And wherever we go to aid non-human life, it behaves in a similar way. One can only aid a being that directs itself toward something, but is too weak to reach it. There is only teleology in human action because and insofar as there is a direction in natural tendency.[44]

There can be further reasons for *not* acting on our hunger (e.g., it is Lent and I am fasting, or someone else needs the food more, etc.). But there is an asymmetry: these are indeed *further* reasons, i.e., all things being equal, nature has the *first* word.[45] Without it, there could be no starting point for other reasons and deliberations. There are no obligations if there are no preceding unchosen tendencies; the question "why be moral" comes too late and is for that reason an immoral question. Nature and its teleology is foundational for ethics and its justifications. For example, the begetting of children in marriage does not need a reason; in fact, it cannot have reasons: it is impossible to justify their existence to our future children (though *making* them in vitro puts us precisely in the position of having to do so). Rather, it is the *refraining* from having children in marriage that can and must be justified.

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44. "The Unrelinquishability of Teleology," in *Contemporary Perspectives on Natural Law: Natural Law as a Limiting Concept*, ed. Ana Marta González (New York: Routledge, 2016), 293.

45. *Personen*, 64.

While our conscious choices therefore rest on nature, at the same time our biology is never *pure* biology: even nutrition and procreation are in *human* animals ultimately only intelligible in a human way, namely a way that involves yet again the self-transcendence of a political being made for friendship. Eating and begetting take the form of self-transcendence as a *feast*, ultimately as the "wedding banquet of the lamb" from the book of Revelation.[46] On the other hand, the feast must not be divorced from the natural ends of its biology: contraception or the Roman vomitorium (for the sake of continued eating) are a perversion for exactly the same reason.[47] They use our rational capacity for self-transcendence to turn our biological nature selfishly into itself (*incurvatio in seipsum*)—in a way that is worse than an animal nature might be self-centered, when left to itself. If, on the other hand, our biology is wedded to our rational capacities for self-transcendence, then we are fully awake to the feast.

SELF-TRANSCENDENCE, HAPPINESS, AND SOLIPSISM

By contrast with this wakefulness to reality, the modern world lets the subject turn in on itself in a way that is dreamlike: all reality becomes virtual reality. One can see this with Descartes, who not only begins the objectification of the external world, but also makes it into that virtual reality of the hypostatized geometry which is his *res extensa*. At the same time, Descartes needs to be convinced that the external world exists at all, and that not everything is a dream. This "dream problem" is new and had not occurred to the ancient world, perhaps with the exception of Heraclitus, whom Spaemann quotes with the following: "When waking, we have one and a common world. Those dreaming, however, each turn to their own."[48]

Modern anthropocentrism makes the world unreal, a dream. In a dream, everything is only *for me*, it is not a "being-

46. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 214f.

47. Ibid., 215f. In this way, nature provides a limit for what is allowed; without it, all is our choice, and *volenti non fit iniuria* (e.g., the cannibal of Rotenburg, who ate a collaborating victim).

48. E.g., at the beginning of *Glück und Wohlwollen*.

for-itself" (*Selbstsein*). Apart from my dream, apart from being an appearance to me, it does not exist. There might be no reality behind the appearance, no "thing in itself," no substance, no noumenon behind the phenomenon. This structure mirrors the modern technological outlook: the world is only there for my purposes and as a function for my self-preservation. It does not have any purposes (and hence no reality) for itself; it is only there as a "standing reserve" (Heidegger). The mechanical simulation of the external world (animals as machines, early ideas of robots or "automata") lends itself to manipulations for our purposes, while at the same time pretending to be the true account of reality: if we can simulate something, then we think we have understood what it is.[49] Reality becomes its own simulation: virtual reality, a dream, a projection of our solipsism.[50] Thus "we never make a step beyond ourselves" (D. Hume). Loss of teleology and loss of self-transcendence are of one piece.

Sleep itself is ambiguous in its meaning. It can be the dream state of the Heraclitus quote, the sleep of virtual reality and the sleep of anxiety that overcame the disciples in Gethsemane. But it can also be the self-forgetful sleep praised by Charles Péguy: the sleep of Christ in the storm, the sleepwalking faith of Peter on the water—expressions of self-transcendence in their reliance on something greater. It is the ecstatic sleep of the faculties of the mystic and the self-forgetfulness of the "right hand not knowing what the left is doing," where "God gives to his own in sleep."

Similarly ambiguous is the notion of *temporality* in Spaemann's thought. On the one hand, temporality can function as a form of self-transcendence: in time, we become external to ourselves while remaining the same. For example, yesterday's pain is not painful today (it can even be a source of joy); yet it is still *my* pain, it is recalled as a pain that I did experience from the inside, in a first-person perspective. In recalling yesterday's

49. Today, this is truer than ever, given the current advances of artificial "intelligence;" and more than ever, it includes us ourselves.

50. For those who still believe in God, the creator then becomes the chief engineer—somewhat like the mad scientist of this virtual reality in which we live ("Was heißt: 'Die Kunst ahmt die Natur nach'?," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 114, no. 2 [2007]: 247–64, at 251).

pain, I experience myself in both first- and third-person perspective; inside and outside, subject and object are intertwined in *one* experience. A thermostat (and perhaps an animal) do not hold these two elements or states together over time in the same way.[51] Our experience of time is at once time-transcendent.[52] Likewise, human intentionality unfolds within time with the memories, hopes and expectations that inform the present moment with their irreversible directionality. In this way, the present moment is not self-enclosed, but intrinsically transcends itself. By contrast, the focus on the atomic moment of sense impressions or pleasure states, found in Hume as well as in Epicurus's refusal to consider death, is a denial of our temporality; it is a denial of self-transcendence.[53]

While temporality is thus a form of self-transcendence, still, temporality itself needs to be transcended as well (hence the ambiguity of temporality). Sleep lets us sink into the river of time, into the stream of consciousness above which we rise in our wakeful states. In our wakeful states we engage a common world; we use language that transcends our private subjectivities into a public realm of propositions and truth claims. These are not stream-like, but discrete in abstracting from their context; they transcend temporality with their unchanging and unconditional truth value.[54] They can be engaged one by one and questioned in their truth claims.

Spaemann's theory of truth—yet another form of self-transcendence—is thus essentially an intersubjectivity theory of truth. It is also a theological theory of truth. Following a lead of Nietzsche, Spaemann correlates truth with the divine point of view. Truth is the coincidence of reality and appearance. Kant's *intellectus archetypus* is that intellect which transcends the dichoto-

51. *Personen*, 51; a dog seeing the stick may associate past states by reflex without recognizing their unity with the present.

52. *Personen*, 112–15, 122, 192.

53. Accordingly, Asian forms of meditation, in focusing on the present moment, aim at eliminating self-transcendence together with the self. Both become unreal *uno actu*.

54. This will also be an analogue to the context-independence of moral acts: they cannot be relativized in the fashion of consequentialism but can constitute moral absolutes.

my of phenomenon and noumenon, because this intellect's concepts constitute the very reality of the thing in itself. Any of our truth claims anticipate this divine point of view. We cannot eliminate God from the picture without eliminating the notion of truth as well—a consequence that has been embraced by Nietzsche and Richard Rorty.

But even if Nietzsche and Rorty deny the notion of truth, they cannot get rid of *grammar.* Grammar is indeed more fundamental than our truth claims: before something can be true or false, it must be meaningful. Now even on this more fundamental level of grammar there is a peculiar feature of our language that cannot escape theological implications, namely the *futurum exactum* or future perfect. Tomorrow *it will have been true* that today I am writing this text. If tomorrow it turns out not to have been true that I am now writing this text, then I am not now writing this text. The reality of the present depends on what will have been true in the future, and this as a matter of principle. But *for whom* will this have been true tomorrow? Truth resides in the mind, and whose mind will it be, if humanity has suffered its demise, or after the heat death of the universe? Here, too, we need a mind that exists unconditionally as a foundation for our grammar and its implications. And that is the mind of God.[55]

Certainly, further arguments may be made in this matter; but it is just one more way in which we can show that a solipsistic outlook without a transcendent viewpoint is not the outlook of common sense or worthy of the life of persons. Descartes himself, in raising the dream problem must anticipate this transcendent view, even just to ask the question meaningfully. For to call something a "mere dream" means to contrast it with something that is not a mere dream, namely reality, being. Only from this perspective can the question be a question. Only in making the distinction between appearance and reality, between thought (*cogitare*) and being, is the "cogito (ergo) sum" a meaningful conclusion rather than a meaningless tautology. Against solipsism, Spaemann always insists that the "cogito sum" is an

55. "Das unsterbliche Gerücht," in *Das unsterbliche Gerücht. Die Frage nach Gott und die Täuschung der Moderne* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 11–36.

inference.[56] For him, the very dignity of persons depends on being *capax Dei* and *capax Veritatis*.

And so does the *happiness* of persons. We can imagine someone being tied to a gurney (or perhaps even as a brain in the vat), unconscious of his environment but with electrodes to his brain that—as the controlling scientist assures us—will keep him in a euphoric state in perpetuity. Assuming that we can safely accept the claim that this state will indeed persist, the question arises: Do we think that this person on the gurney is happy? Spaemann suggests, with R. M. Hare, that the test question is this: Would we want to change places with this person?[57] Presumably, the answer is "no."[58] That the very question is important shows that the *external perspective* is important. Happiness cannot be reduced to a mere solipsistic first-person experience. Without the confirming outside perspective, happiness is not real. At the same time, the first-person perspective is also important: if I am in pain, then the doctor can assure me all he wants that this cannot be true; I know better. In the case of happiness, both perspectives, inside and outside, subject and object, must be intertwined, otherwise happiness is not real.[59] And unreal happiness is not happiness.[60] For happiness is the telos of human nature and human nature is self-transcending. Happiness is our telos. It aims at actualization, at reality, and the actualization of a rational nature is self-transcending: it anticipates the outside point of view.[61] Being itself is defined in this way; reality cannot just be

56. "Die Bedeutung des 'sum' im 'cogito sum,'" *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 41, no. 3 (1987): 373–82.

57. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 60–63; this is reminiscent of Robert Nozick's "experience machine," but I don't think Spaemann knew this thought experiment.

58. It is disconcerting that my students increasingly are willing to answer "yes"—perhaps a sign of our age.

59. *Beatam me dicent omnes generationes* says the Blessed Virgin Mary—i.e., it is the perspective of others that will seal her blessedness.

60. Analogously, Aristotle suggests that the king dying on the battlefield, thinking that the battle is won, is happy if it is true, but unhappy if not.

61. It is an "ex-centric position"; that Aristotle's agent intellect comes from the outside (*thyraten*) is an indication of the self-transcending nature of reason (*Glück und Wohlwollen*, 110).

reality *for me*, without becoming unreal.[62] Like truth, being is defined as a space of self-transcendence. For Spaemann, it is thus not completely surprising that, in the Christian tradition, God as the paradigm of reality, as Subsisting Being Itself, is conceived of as a Trinity, i.e., as an interpersonal space of self-transcendence.[63] This observation is not a deduction of the Trinity, but it contributes to the plausibility of the Christian God. Persons are the paradigm of reality, precisely in so far as they come in the plural. There are no persons without other persons in so far as each person anticipates its subjectivity to become objective to the view of the other; every "I" implies a "Thou."

In our own experience of happiness, we typically do not *know* that we are happy when we are in the immediate midst of it. We know it only in subsequent *reflection*. Yet in that reflection happiness is already past; we are taking an external viewpoint on ourselves. So then, when is happiness? In the spontaneity of the present moment or in subsequent reflection? In our own experience, or in the viewpoint of the other? Perhaps in neither, but in a present, which is timeless and just itself, as Spaemann suggests with a poem by Pessoa.[64] As Pascal said: "Our happiness is not either inside of us or outside of us, but in God, and inside of us and outside of us."[65] The outside perspective that defines our happiness is also inside of us; it is the perspective of an *absolute* spectator.[66]

Happiness also refers to life as a whole.[67] That is why we should call no one happy before his end. But after this end, whose perspective is it? Short of considering the afterlife, it is not ours. And certainly it is not ours during our life. So then when does

62. See *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 86f, and the important essay "Wirklichkeit als Anthropomorphismus."

63. *Personen*, 47f. and 175.

64. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 89; as such, happiness, authenticity and spontaneity cannot be directly intended, as Spaemann urges with Kleist's essay on the *Marionettentheater*; cf. *Fénelon*, 131f.

65. Pascal, *Pensées*, n. 465; *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 74.

66. Ibid., 43.

67. This ultimate wherefore is goodness as one-place predicate (*Glück und Wohlwollen*, 112); the whole cannot be good for something else, or it would not be the whole.

this happy wholeness become a reality? In some way throughout: our life is always already lived under this perspective, for without it, happiness cannot be understood. The whole of our life is part of itself, for the whole of life is constitutive of each of its moments in its meaning (happiness being that meaning). We can only live happily into the whole by hope. But in doing so, we live for a transcendent viewpoint that is not ours. We want our lives to succeed—for the sake of someone else.[68]

And so, our telos and happiness is defined by self-transcendence. Aristotle, too, considered happiness and our telos in terms of self-transcendence, namely friendship. But with what has just been said it is the friendship of *God* that comes into view, something that Aristotle thought impossible. To be sure, friendship with God indeed transcends our natural teleology and requires grace. Nevertheless, precisely this transcendence is in some way anticipated in our nature. Otherwise grace would not perfect, but destroy our nature.[69] While grace is not something that we can claim, not something in our own power or owed to us, it is itself something like the gift of friendship: "what we can do through our friends that we can do in some sense ourselves," says Aristotle.[70] The early modern extrinsecism of grace is the dialectic opposite to the emerging survival paradigm, where nature turns in on itself, even "intrinsecistically" swallowing up God himself, as in Spinoza's *deus sive natura*. But both extremes—totally immanent self-sufficiency, and transcendent grace as totally extrinsic to nature—agree that nature is enclosed in itself; its telos is not self-transcendence.

Accordingly, modern notions of happiness collapse into self-absorption: atomic acts of pleasure without temporal extension. They can be produced by various efficient causes, but they do not transcend themselves toward an intentional object.

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68. "Jemand anderem zuliebe" (*Glück und Wohlwollen*, 35f).

69. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 60, a. 5c (hereafter cited as *ST*).

70. "Nature," 960f., and *Eth. Nic.* 1112b25. Already for the commandment in Eden it was true that nothing in our natural teleology anticipated that divine command, yet it was necessary to elicit our full human response (cf. *Meditationen eines Christen* vol. 2 [Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2016], 170; and "Über einige Schwierigkeiten mit der Erbsündenlehre," in *Das unsterbliche Gerücht*, 185–211).

What Spaemann means is the following: such subjective pleasure states can be produced by electrodes, as in the thought experiment above, or drugs and perhaps a number of other things. This means that these states have "causal equivalents," which do not themselves enter into the experience. By contrast, true happiness is an intentional state, i.e., a state that is defined by its intentional object. The joy I have *in* a Beethoven sonata is intrinsically different from the joy I take in a fugue by Bach. The intentional object is the formal cause of the joy, not its efficient cause. That is why there are no causal equivalents here, Bach cannot be replaced by Beethoven *salva veritate*. As Wittgenstein noticed: we cannot treat them like detergents, where one might do the job as well as the other. And so this is one more way in which happiness is tied to self-transcendence. Spaemann takes inspiration here from both Max Scheler and Antonine Arnauld.[71] With Scheler he also noticed that true joy is *deeper* and more fundamental than mere states of pleasure: joy can persist even where there is no pleasure, whereas pleasure can go together with a deep unhappiness and frustration about the meaninglessness of life—the predicament of a hedonistic society.

Beauty, too, is a form of happiness: as Leibniz suggests, beauty is an *ontological* happiness or perfection. And just as we transcend ourselves when we *delight in* the happiness of a friend, so we can take a "disinterested pleasure" (Kant) in the beauty of a work of art. We associate with art works as we associate with persons or friends (and some are better not to be associated with). The experience of beauty is an experience of self-transcendence, because in it we take delight in the very being of the other.

In an essay on what it means that "art imitates nature," Spaemann distinguishes various forms of imitation, such as technical simulation, or imitating the way in which things appear. But this might just lead us to more virtual realities. A better sense of imitation can be found in a paradoxical simulation of non-simulation. It means making present what is more than simulation, namely the mind-independent reality of something that is a being-for-itself (*Selbstsein*) and not just for us. It is the appearance

71. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 55–59. Spaemann in his enthusiasm for Arnauld once asked that our institute order his complete works, not realizing that our little library would not have room for the 43 volumes.

of the thing in itself as the thing in itself. It is precisely this element that has disappeared in the course of the history of art in modernity, beginning with the virtual realities of the Baroque era. And it has a parallel in the history of sacramental theology: it is at the same time that Protestantism replaces the real presence of the Eucharist with the virtual presence of mere symbols or memories. By contrast, retaining faith in the real presence of the Eucharist may be the veritable antidote to modern virtual realities: the Eucharist is all reality, and no appearance, whereas in cyberspace everything is all appearance and no reality.[72] Spaemann did see the sacramental element reappear in modern art, in which that which is represented is often invisible (Joseph Beuys, Christo, Walter de Maria).

This invites a word on Spaemann and art: it might be less known that Spaemann had an appreciation for modern art, visiting the *Documenta* exhibitions in Kassel and owning not only a painting of the Sacred Heart by Georges Rouault, but also paintings by Fernand Léger and other modern artists. His father early on studied under Paul Klee and László Moholy-Nagy at the Bauhaus, his mother was an expressionist dancer under Mary Wigman; they met each other in the home of Käthe Kollwitz (his father later studied art history under H. Wölfflin before becoming a priest). Spaemann himself also loved the German poets from the Romantic period, such as Clemens Brentano and Joseph Eichendorff (he thought the best thing ever written on Eichendorff was Adorno's essay). He introduced me to Arvo Pärt's rendering of Brentano's *Es sang vor langen Jahren* (about a nightingale, his favorite bird). I have never heard someone else read poetry so convincingly and movingly, yet without any drama and sentiment.[73]

For Spaemann, art's sacramental structure of self-transcendence did not sit well with certain media, such as TV (he never owned a TV set). In the 1950s he was one of the most vig-

72. However, in a personal exchange of letters, Spaemann argued that, as an artifact, bread actually becomes "substantial" for the first time only after the transubstantiation.

73. There was nothing aloof in his tastes: he also could relish Charles Schultz's "Peanuts."

orous opponents of showing Mass on TV.[74] It meant virtualizing the most real of all realities. As the "art of the keyholes" (Jean Cocteau), filming the Mass meant privatizing what was the most real and public of all events: the anticipation of the Last Judgment, the pilgrimage of all peoples to Mount Zion. Similarly, it is a perverse voyeurism to watch people dying on a battlefield in a film. The reporter who made the film is in a different situation: he risked his life himself. Only in risking ourselves is there true self-transcendence: not as a "peeping Tom" do we engage the reality of the Other, but only if we really are there ourselves. Only if we can be seen by the other, should they be seen by us. And only in this engagement do we become real ourselves, which might be one of the ways of understanding the Mass.

STEPPING BEYOND ONESELF: PERSONHOOD

All that has been said is characteristic of us as persons. Though Spaemann always advocated respect for the teleology of animals (it was Cartesians who started the worst animal experiments), their teleology is naturally turned in on itself (*incurvata in seipsum*). For us, this egocentric structure is the structure of sin; we cannot, in good faith, try to be like animals. Animals do not live their life under the viewpoint of a temporal whole, their life is lived in Epicurean fashion, in self-enclosed atomic states. That is why we may kill them (though only for good reasons). Our responsibility for them is only for *how* they live, not *whether*.[75] This is different for human beings.

Yet there are ethicists who would consider this distinction to be a form of speciesism. For them, we are ourselves only subjective states of consciousness, never taking a step beyond ourselves (Hume). For John Locke, this is what persons are: their reality is their appearance to themselves. While the *human being* might be a human organism, *persons* are defined by their consciousness of themselves; the very identity of this con-

74. See Robert Spaemann, "A Keyhole for Unbelievers? The Public Character of Cultus and the Broadcasting of the Mass on TV," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 45, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2018): 629–36.

75. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 155 and 231.

sciousness is defined by the consciousness of that identity. John Locke's distinction is adopted by Peter Singer and others in order to be able to declare whole groups of human beings not to be persons. In the absence of some vaguely defined higher states of consciousness, people in vegetative states, embryos and even infants, many mentally handicapped and disabled people, as well as the braindead, would, by that criterion, lose their rights as persons, including their right to life. While Spaemann even had to call out a German cardinal for picking up that distinction, in Germany Peter Singers's theses were then still anathema. While in the US Singer's books were used as college textbooks, the Germans, especially the disabled, prevented Singer from speaking on their campuses. Spaemann supported these protests. Free speech covers cases in which someone questions my beliefs, but not cases where someone questions my very existence. This ends the conversation, because it questions the very existence of the interlocutor. It eliminates the very paradigm of personhood as self-transcendence. It is worse than war, and perhaps even than terrorism: in war, the enemy is still respected as a person and as a bearer of rights. Where the very object of ethics is questioned, the conflict ceases to be a matter of theory; at this point, one can only fight.[76]

Persons are those beings who have a claim on our recognition. If we cannot even recognize this claim, all ethics becomes futile. The person before me is more real than any theory. It is more certain that I must not kill him, than that I must not kill anyone in general. A person confronts me with reality and its claims in a way that no other entity does; he makes my conscience speak: "you will not kill me" (Levinas). And if we heed this call, if, for example, we allow the disabled person to solicit our help rather than to kill him, then the disabled person will solicit and enable our very own reality and personhood.

Such relationships are always personal; they are like the relationship between children and their dying parents, or between a doctor and a patient. They are not like the relationship between an ethics committee and a patient, where the patient is a "case." For the scientific community, human beings are interesting specimen, but persons are never cases. A patient is not truly

76. Ibid., 132f.

real for an ethics committee, in the same way that the ethics committee is not real for the patient. The committee's is a false form of transcendence, one of calculating objectification. Committees might be necessary for other reasons (triaging, informing the doctor's choices etc.), but they cannot replace the relationship of personal closeness and care, if the person as a person is not to disappear in objectifying calculations.[77] The true ethical situation cannot be replaced by the scientific paradigm situation of an experiment. The latter is always repeatable and quantifiable, the being of the person is not.[78]

Persons have their telos in such personal relationships, be it in self-transcending friendship or analogous forms.[79] In his book *Personen*, Spaemann highlights a few striking features of the person as *capax transcendentalitatis* in which this becomes evident:

Language

There is no private language. Language itself loses its intelligibility if it does not embody and anticipate an outside perspective. Language is not a scream: we scream even if nobody is around, but language anticipates a response and the perspective of the other. Apes using sign language do not anticipate this response; at best they try to manipulate each other; they do not listen to each other. Where we cease to recognize others as persons, we stop talking to them (like Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*). We also learn our first language from other persons (typically our mother), not

77. Ibid., 179–81.

78. Spaemann contrasts *experiments* with *experience*, the latter being something unique and not quantifiable. He considers theology to be a science of such experience. The uniqueness of miracles and revelations, the particularity of religious truth claims should not disqualify theology from being a science. We enter the faith in a way similar to the way we enter friendships, in the context of unique and untestable experiences. A friendship that is being tested by experiment has already ended. See "Was ist das Neue? Vom Ende des modernen Bewußtseins," *Die politische Meinung* 27 (1982): 11–27.

79. There are remaining ambiguities between Spaemann's personalism and his Aristotelianism, which cannot be discussed here; for an attempt at reconciliation see Anselm Ramelow, "The Person in the Abrahamic Tradition: Is the Judeo-Christian Concept of Personhood Consistent?," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (2013): 593–610.

from a computer or TV set.[80] Language is inseparable from the space of persons. The system of personal pronouns emerges only at once; there is no primacy of the I over the Thou.

Truth

We have already seen how our capacity for truth and for God are related. This capacity is part of our dignity as persons. As persons, and contrary to evolutionary epistemology, we can take an interest in truth apart from any survival interest.[81] We have seen earlier how intentionality as a "drive" implies the emergence of negativity (absence) and thereby immateriality. This drive, however, is egocentric, making the world into an environment for the organism and its purposes. For persons, truth and reality emerge where two such drives meet and are able to recognize each other. Together they form the double negation that defines being.[82] Knowledge is defined teleologically as achieving truth, and truth is the reaching of the reality of the other ("*fieri aliud inquantum aliud*," as Spaemann quotes John of St. Thomas[83]). As he explained to Hilary Putnam, persons should be the paradigm case for externalism, for reaching external reality.[84] For in this case, I make a judgment about someone's reality who can make a judgment about this judgment of mine.[85] As to existence predication, B. Russell ("On Denoting") had tried to avoid the problem that existence predication is tautological by shifting our predication to universals. Aristotle might indeed agree that existence is the instantiation of a general term, but the *prote ousia* is the paradigm of existence nevertheless, and what instantiation means

80. *Personen*, 100f.

81. Ibid., 234.

82. Ibid., 50 and 62f. Being is not a concept, nor a sensation, but the correlate of an act of recognition ("Über Die Bedeutung der Worte 'ist,' 'existiert' und 'es gibt,'" *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 117 [2010]: 5–19, at 15).

83. E.g., Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 63.

84. *Gott und Welt*, 242. Spaemann also appealed to Davidson's notion of an interpersonal space of shared beliefs and intelligibility. Davidson spent a semester with us in Munich.

85. See also "Wirklichkeit als Anthropomorphismus."

has not thereby been answered. It is not merely "to be the value of a bound variable" (Quine). For Spaemann, the paradigm for existence is life (*vivere viventibus est esse*), a form of being-for-itself (*Selbstsein*). Persons are the prime example, and it is in them that we encounter reality most paradigmatically.[86]

Freedom, promising and forgiveness

Promising implies that we can guarantee for ourselves in the future, independently from how we will feel then. A promise creates "desire-independent reasons for action" (Searle). We are the animal that can promise (Nietzsche), and it is significant that today many do not trust themselves to make promises and commitments anymore.[87] It indicates a low esteem of ourselves as persons. Promises can illustrate the relationship to our life as a whole, where we take our lives into our hands to give it away until death (marriage or religious vows). Such promises remain valid, even if we do not remember them anymore. They imply a personal relationship, and in it a personal identity that is independent from the Lockean memory criterion. Contrary to any survival paradigm, promises can transcend even death (promises to the dying).[88] Spaemann argues that promising is not only essential to what persons are, but that persons are themselves the promise of keeping promises: someone might argue that he does not need to keep a promise, unless he has also promised to keep that promise. But under these conditions it is easy to see that we would get into an infinite regress. The only thing that stops that regress is the person: the person just is the promise to keep promises, an unconditional stopping point.[89]

86. "Über Die Bedeutung der Worte 'ist,' 'existiert' und 'es gibt,'" 5–19. All other predication relates to existence predication as part to whole (ibid., 18).

87. *Personen*, 235–51.

88. For contrast, cf. Spinoza: "nobody is going to keep any promises whatsoever except through fear of greater evil or hope of greater good" (*Tractatus theologico politicus*, ch. 16).

89. "An Animal That Can Promise and Forgive," interview with Holger Zaborowski, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 511–21.

Without promising there also can be no social contract. And short of another infinite regress, membership in that social contract cannot again be a contract. Being capable of promising simply is to be a person, it is to be a member. By contrast, one cannot make a contract with an animal or promise the animal something. It requires self-transcendence to give others a claim on me, and others in freedom can refuse to accept such a promise, too.[90]

Freedom implies responsibility and with that, a need (and ability) to forgive. But the reverse might be true as well: forgiveness enables freedom, namely the freedom to transcend who I have become by my misdeed.[91] Forgiveness calls the person forth into the common space of self-transcendence. Though cynicism and capriciousness can deny that offer.[92] If forgiveness implies the freedom to transcend who we have become, then we will not want God's love to be as "unconditional" as some people claim it is. God would then himself be cynical about who we are and deprive us of the freedom that comes with forgiveness. This freedom means that he calls us to conversion for our own good. Like a conversion, forgiveness requires the help of another. We cannot forgive ourselves, nor even know our blind spots. We know each other's blind spots and so help each other to awaken to reality in forgiveness and reconciliation.[93]

The value and being of persons

In their self-transcendence, persons "have" themselves (and therefore transcend themselves) in a way that animals do not.[94]

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90. Ibid., 512f; this can mean to reject someone as person, but at times someone might also try to promise the impossible.

91. Shame is a reaction not to my *deed* (that would then rather be a judgment of *conscience*), but a feeling that is about my very *being*. Only persons have it. See Robert Spaemann, "How Could You Do What You Did?," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 643-651, at 643–51.

92. *Personen*, 231, 235–51; with this, forgiveness stops the entropy of the chain reaction of sin (ibid., 109f).

93. Ibid., 247–51. That we have blind spots seems to be a premoral fact; for Spaemann there is even a premoral sense of forgiveness (ibid., 241f.).

94. For Spaemann, personhood is defined by this "having" (and here, for once, having is more than being); this includes the having and thereby tran-

We can relate to who we are, including to our whole life. But this "having" of ourselves is precisely not meant to be the capacity to become egocentric solipsists, making ourselves absolute. It is meant to be a way of transcending and relativizing ourselves and the biological needs of the nature that we have. But precisely this gives us our dignity (*Würde*).[95] Because we can relativize ourselves, we are absolute. Because we can sacrifice ourselves, nobody else must sacrifice us. Because we can have duties, we cannot be slaves. Unlike an animal, we can take our life; but we can also give it back to God, rather than just deceasing (*verenden*) like an animal.[96]

Ontologically, the person's being is the having of potentialities. But as such, the person himself must be actual. A person cannot itself be potential. There are no possible persons, only actual ones.[97] The being of persons is the being of the "first act;" as such, persons cannot come about by an alteration, but only all at once, by generation. We are begotten, not made. Generation is therefore also the root of our membership:[98] we are persons by being descended from human parents, not by being coopted for certain qualities.[99] Membership is not conditional on any further qualities. Our origin by generation is the only possible point of reference that is unqualified. There is something incongruent in setting conditions for admission, where it is about bearers of unconditional rights.[100]

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scending of existence, consciousness, soul, political opinions, perceptions; *Personen*, 40, 18, 170, 154f. et passim; cf. even conscience's relationship towards its contents (*Personen*, 179–81).

95. *Wert oder Würde des Menschen*, in *Der Wert des Menschen. An den Grenzen des Humanen*, ed. Konrad-Paul Liessmann (Wien: Zsolnay, 2006), 21–46.

96. *Personen*, 131–33.

97. Dreamt or virtual persons are not persons (*Personen*, 77f.).

98. But also of our identity, for which our genealogy is crucial; this why incest as well as heterologous insemination bring about confusion regarding our very identity (ibid., 79).

99. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 153.

100. Our ability to *know* persons must therefore be similarly unconditional; there is something of an epistemic postulate here for Spaemann.

LOVE

Our earlier discussion of the natural law formulated an asymmetric relationship between the particularities of our biological needs and our rational self-transcendence in the common good. The latter presupposed the former. Once the survival paradigm took over, however, a certain dialectic ensued: the particular biological nature was reinterpreted in terms of survival functions, while the universal natural law was seen in opposition to it as the moral law and duty (Kant).[101]

In his habilitation dissertation, Spaemann discovered an early theological dispute of a similar dialectic, the dispute about "pure love." Can there be pure intentions (Kantian or otherwise), or are we always self-interested (as the French Moralists would say)? Can we love someone selflessly without reflecting on our own interest? Can we love *God* without self-interest, or can we love him, even though we knew that he had prepared hell for us ("*resignatio in infernum*")? Fénelon said "yes," Bossuet said "no;" Leibniz tried to mediate with the formula "*delectatio in felicitate alterius*" ("delight in the happiness of the other").

Fénelon and the Quietists were concerned to defend the immediacy and spontaneity of a love, which does not need to reflect on its interests. In that it is *childlike*. Spaemann always took some pride in the discovery of the importance of this dispute to the appreciation of childhood, from Teresa of Avila to the high aristocracy that aligned itself with Fénelon and the Quietists, all the way to Rousseau. Bossuet's side, on the other hand, including the Jansenists, was Cartesian and abhorred the state of childhood as devoid of reason (though this also accounted for its lack of self-reflection and self-interest).[102] They were bourgeois adherents of the survival paradigm.[103]

Spaemann, however, observes that *both* sides were Cartesians, and both embraced the self-preservation paradigm: Bossuet

101. One might find antecedents in Arnold Geulincx.

102. *Reflexion und Spontaneität*, 138–58.

103. The two sides may also be found in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza respectively. Where the aristocrat would say *my life belongs to the king, but not my honor*, this might make little sense to the bourgeois outlook. Somewhat in between, the Jansenists with their *délectation supérieure* were *noblesse de robe*.

is more modern in his anticipation of the "selfish schools," while Fénelon could think of nature only as something to be rejected in its self-interestedness. Aquinas, on the other hand, knew that it could be part of our nature to love God more than ourselves, just as the part loves the whole more than itself.[104] And indeed, we sing "*gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam*." The debate may be about a false alternative.

When it comes to love among human persons, Spaemann also wants to avoid false alternatives. But here the mediation takes more the form of antinomies or paradoxes.[105] The opposition of *amor benevolentiae* and *amor concupiscentiae* might be too easy. Universal benevolence and selflessness might be a false universal—perhaps akin to those who say, "I love humanity, it's just people that I cannot stand." Nor would it be a human form of love, which will always be particular: "Not around everybody can be that glow that is around those we love."[106] Our friends do not seem replaceable to us. "Only for God is *everyone* irreplaceable," says Davila. And yet, even for God this might not be true; he, too, might be particular, as Pavel Florensky's observations of divine jealousy in the bible show. "Total absence of jealousy at a given occasion is an insult of the beloved person, who in this is degraded to one among others."[107] Even self-lessness can seem like an insult: we want to be *needed* in such a relationship. "He, who only wants to be the giver, does not give enough," for he humiliates the other. Even God makes himself needy for our sakes.

The point here is that self-forgetful love and the love of unique persons rather belong together. It is the unique relationship that allows both persons to transcend themselves; in the abstract this would not happen. In marriage there is, in addition, a kind of self-transcendence into the species in the self-forgetfulness of the act of begetting in which the species reproduces

104. *ST* I, q. 60, a. 5; the hand sacrifices itself to defend the whole body without further thought. *Reflexion und Spontaneität*, 47.

105. "The Paradoxes of Love," trans. Anselm Ramelow, in *Love and the Dignity of Human Life: On Nature and Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1–26.

106. Ibid., 20.

107. Ibid.; we would not be happy with a friendship if the friend benevolently wishes us well, but is not interested in seeing us.

itself; but it is, moreover, inserted in a personalized context: the promises of marriage vows raise both persons above the stream of life. Both aspects appear to be forms of self-transcendence and yet are part of a unique relationship. The children born of this relationship are again loved in a way that is not merely universal, but allows us to privilege them: contrary to Singer, among drowning children we can save our own first.[108] These are relations of nearness and closeness that correspond to our own finitude, but also to who persons are (i.e., not replaceable specimen).

In awakening to another person, the other becomes real to us (*amor oculus est*);[109] the happiness and the interests of the other become mine.[110] Only in the "dream" state, Kantian duty and happiness fall apart, "*Geist*" and "*Leben*" are separated.[111] For Kant (who knew that both belonged together in the *summum bonum*) it takes the postulate of God's existence to reunite them (though only after we have done our duty).

TRUE SELF-TRANSCENDENCE, FALSE WHOLES AND PARTS

There are false ways of trying to unite these two sides of egoism and altruism. The strange hybrid of utilitarianism, for example, is at once eudemonistic and universalizing. It is universalizing in that the end of all actions is the whole, which is understood as the maximization of some benefit—typically "happiness" as a form of pleasure. What is eliminated in this universalizing whole is the moral value of particular actions. In fact, the particular action as such is dissolved in the continuum of the universal whole:[112]

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108. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 146f.

109. Ibid., 152.

110. This includes subhuman nature; in this wakefulness, to see a beetle struggling on its back and to put him back on its feet is something we do spontaneously without need for justification; to see it, is to do it (see *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 228).

111. This reference is to Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele,* 3 vol. (1929–32), 5th ed. (Bonn: Bouvier, 1972).

112. For the following: "Einzelhandlungen," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 54, no. 4 (2000): 514–31.

actions are defined by their ends, and here the only end is that of the whole. There are no "basic actions" that would be understood as either natural kinds (such as killing, sexual intercourse, eating and drinking) or objective cultural forms with an intrinsic shape, such as speech acts (promising, praising, praying etc.). Since, in this sort of nominalism, the object of each action becomes either subjective or an inaccessible universal whole, we become unintelligible to each other as actors; our intentions become strictly private and arbitrary.

In utilitarianism, actions are considered good, because they enhance the world, while normally we would think that actions enhance the world, because they are good. Spaemann suggests that the particular action does indeed have a relationship to the universal whole of life, but it is not a cause-effect relationship, or a means-ends relationship as in utilitarianism, but rather a part-whole relationship. In this relationship, each action is a basic moral unit but, precisely as such, has an important relationship to the whole. Each action as itself a definite whole represents the whole and thereby each immoral action can ruin a succeeding and meaningful life.

On this model, the whole is not, as in utilitarianism, a calculable sum or totality for which our actions are mere means. Rather, the whole of our life changes with our actions, because they relate to it as parts to the whole.[113] Living our life is not like building a house, but rather like learning to play the piano: the learning process itself can and must be meaningful, even if no definite goal is achieved, e.g., because of a premature death.[114] The goal is already present. Indeed, in practicing I must already play the piano in order to learn how to play: the end is already present. Our life is a *praxis*, not a *poiesis* or the making of some-

113. This model might not lend itself directly to the form of an Aristotelian or Thomistic practical syllogism, but it might be possible to combine both models.

114. A thought of Rousseau's; "Aufhalter," 570–73. For the whole of life there are no "external costs": even side effects are part of the whole; *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 186–90. Yes, *ars longa, vita brevis*, but the *ars* itself is a part of the *vita*. See "Ars longa – vita brevis," in *Ethics of Biomedical Research in a Christian Vision: Proceedings of The Ninth Assembly of The Pontifical Academy for Life Vatican City* (2003), ed. Juan de Dios Vial Correa and Elio Sgreccia (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004); see also Spaemann and Löw, *Frage Wozu?*, 285.

thing; it has its end in itself, not in a product. Though even in making we can find something similar, namely in the case of art: in painting, the work or its idea do not pre-exist, but change with each brush stroke. In analogy with art, there is in our moral actions a "purposivity without purpose," because the whole as the ultimate purpose as symbolized in our actions is not present to us as a definite plan. Each action in some way expresses and symbolizes the meaning of the whole,[115] which is why the whole of life can fail in a particular action. There are moral absolutes, not because actions can fail to produce the whole as an end result, but because they fail to *represent* the whole in a pertinent way.

The same can be said of the persons involved: they matter in their particularity. They relate to the larger whole as *representatives*,[116] not as means to an end. Therefore they must not be sacrificed for a universal maximization of the happiness of all.

In utilitarianism, even the particular actor himself will have a weird relationship to himself: on the one hand, he is playing God, because he pretends to be responsible for the whole.[117] On the other hand, this logic demands that, as a particular actor, he needs to consider himself as sacrificable to this whole. This is not a coherent starting point for action. Typically, the actor will therefore be replaced with experts and the scientific community, leaving two abstract universals facing each other: the scientific community and the maximization of pleasure states.[118] It is also a paradoxical conjunction of momentary, atomic, and quantifiable states of pleasure with a God's eye view of the whole of life,

115. This is why moral actions often have a *ritual* character (important to any culture): like worship, they are an end in themselves, not just a means to further ends (except where they degenerate into magic); *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 142 and "Ritual und Ethos" in *Schritte über uns hinaus*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2010), 353–72.

116. The representation of something holy and unconditional is, by that fact, more than a mere image, it is a representation precisely by its *being in and for itself* with its claim to recognition (*Glück und Wohlwollen*, 127). It is in this way that the German constitution says that "human dignity is untouchable" (*unantastbar*); this is true not empirically, but normatively. Though the empirical reality is also there and still present even in the crucified. "Menschenwürde und menschliche Natur," in *Normativität des Lebens - Normativität der Vernunft?*, ed. Martin Hähnel and Markus Rothhaar (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 37–42.

117. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 164.

118. Ibid., 169.

somehow combing an Epicurean reference to particular pleasure states with the universal teleology of the Stoics.[119] That this universal point of view is a false universal can be seen from the fact that it does not take into account our particular situatedness in time: pleasure and pain are assessed as a quantifiable sum, independently from when they occurred, or where one finally ended one's life. It becomes unintelligible that we can be happy about past pain and aggrieved by lost joy.[120]

The discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas is another form of ethics that does not get the relationship between particular and universal right (though both Spaemann and Habermas always treated each other with respect). Universalization in rational discourse does not produce ethics. The universal of the discourse and its rational criteria must already presuppose the particular person as the bearer of ethics. Universalization presupposes the determination of who counts as a member of this universal.[121] Some may not be able to participate: the elderly and disabled and unborn and future generations. If their interests are to be included, then not as a result of the discourse (in which they are not represented), but for other reasons. And these reasons would be the truly ethical reasons. Discourse ethics needs to presuppose the dignity of the person, which cannot be deduced, but only recognized.[122] Much also depends on the recognition of our shared natural teleology and its biological needs as a source of justification (*Zumutbarkeit*) and an object of negotiation;[123]

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119. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 60. While Kant (sect. V of the *Critique of Practical Reason*) opposes duty or virtue (Stoa) to happiness (Epicurus), and hopes for a reconciliation by postulating the Christian God, Spaemann will point out that Epicureans and Stoics both have their own dialectic of self-preservation.

120. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 56 and 60. The model is economics, but Spaemann points out that even economics has given up on this perspective ("Wer hat wofür Verantwortung? Zum Streit um deontologische oder teleologische Ethik," *Herder-Korrespondenz* 36 [1982]: 345–50 and 403–08).

121. And how we choose behind the veil of ignorance (Rawls) might already depend on what kind of person we are (e.g., gamblers or risk takers).

122. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 182.

123. Ibid., 182f. Spaemann can refer to these as "common values," but he does not mean by it the contemporary talk of merely cultural values (the political correctness of "Western values" etc.), which he considered to be prone to totalitarianism. Values in the sense of Max Scheler are yet different, because

This also is presupposed by the discourse, rather than derived from it.

By contrast with such approaches, Spaemann will emphasize the particular starting point of the person and its natural teleology, which can never be left behind. As in the antimonies of love, the self-transcendence of the person must not be achieved by eliminating, forgetting or destroying this particular starting point.

The model remains friendship as the basis of the polis, and the idea of the "feast,"[124] where common joy is not anyone's property but common to each.[125] However, even the polis or the state are not the true whole qua government: the state can be in conflict with the common good of the family or a particular ethos of piety, as one can see in Antigone. The true whole then only emerges in the conflict of both. For Thomas Aquinas, a wife ought to hide her husband, who flees the law (though she may not become a terrorist). Modern law acknowledges this fact, by giving relatives the right to refuse testimony in court. Judges in turn may excuse themselves for similar conflicts of interest. For Pius XI (*Quas Primas*), too, the common good and the private good have the same root and dignity; they are not reducible to each other.[126]

The abiding importance of particularities also led Spaemann to be skeptical of other false totalities, such as the UN as

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they have an objective order. *Gott und Welt*, 245; "Europa - Wertegemeinschaft oder Rechtsordnung," *Transit - Europäische Revue* 21 (2001): 172–85. Christian monotheism has overcome the tragic conflict of values and duties of polytheism, while postmodern cultural relativism revives the latter (*Kernschmelze*, 51). Spaemann can move between the use of "values" and the Aristotelian teleology of traditional natural law theory, being at home in both. I am not aware of him engaging in the arguments between "new natural law theorists" and Thomists.

124. Theologically, the ultimate, festive transcendence of the particular is somehow located in our relationship with God ("enter into your master's joy"), while preserving our particular biological needs in the heavenly wedding banquet (*Glück und Wohlwollen*, 115).

125. On this basis, Spaemann also argued for the preservation of the free Sunday: free time on a private flexible work schedule is not an equivalent to communal celebration or worship. Similarly, families are more than the sum of their members; that is why children as stakeholders in this unit should have a vote in divorce procedures, he argued.

126. "Politik zuerst? Das Schicksal der Action Française," *Wort und Wahrheit* 8 (1953), 655–62, at 660.

a World State. Such a state has no outside and therefore does not allow for emigration and the seeking of asylum.[127] Even the EU is better understood with de Gaulle as a "Europe of Fatherlands," i.e., of particulars with their own dignity. True patriots can appreciate other people's patriotism. True cultures are not nationalistic or self-enclosed as in Spengler or Toynbee, but hospitable to other cultures. This does not in turn mean ideological multi-culturalism, but something like the translatability of national languages, which do not thereby cease to exist or be replaced by Esperanto. The unity of humanity does not appear in a one-world government, but in this kind of translatability, which is a form of self-transcendence.[128] It also does not exclude that Christian patriots can find themselves on two sides of an armed conflict; they can love their enemies, even if they have to fight each other to the point of death.

Christianity provides the proper perspective. It has replaced the pre-Christian notion of "angels of peoples" at war with each other with the One Mediator who unites the family of nations in one Church.[129] But it is a *church*, not a state. The unity is proleptic and eschatological; it anticipates the pilgrimage of all nations to Mount Zion. And the unity is, again, begun in a particular: the Jews as the chosen people.

Spaemann saw the irony and danger that Christian universalism becomes successful only in a time when Christianity is actually abandoned.[130] It now comes about under the auspices of economy and technology (the tower of Babel), somehow as an

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127. *Kernschmelze*, 23. There might be something "solipsistic" about such a state without an outside perspective.

128. "About Normality," in *Proceedings of the 14th General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for the Life*, ed. Elio Sgreccia and Jean Laffitte (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009).

129. The Church Fathers saw the personal guardian angels taking their place; Joan of Arc's inspiration by St. Michael does not mean nationalism, because St. Michael is the protector of Christianity as such ("Die Sendung der Jeanne d'Arc," *Wort und Wahrheit* 8 [1953]: 376–78, at 377f.). The angels are not at war with each other, but they inquire into God's will (which they do not know) from different particular angles (*ST* I, q. 113, a. 8c).

130. Already Kant's "philosophical Chiliasm" envisions the universal "Rechtsgemeinschaft" in contrast with the particular faiths ("Weltgeschichte und Heilsglaube," *Hochland* 50 [1957/58]: 297–311).

attempt of the Antichrist to reach the ends of the world before Christ can get there. In that, universalism has made progress.

Christianity, on the other hand, is "progressive" only in its command to baptize all nations and in the proper understanding of the development of dogma. Otherwise it does not believe in progress, but rather in a final disaster, the apocalypse.[131]

HISTORY AS SELF-PRESERVATION AND TRANSCENDENCE

Liturgically, Spaemann supported the traditional form of the Mass (he taught me how to serve it). But he was deeply skeptical of our ability to preserve the past. After the war, he disliked the rebuilding of what was destroyed by Allied bombs. In fact, even before the destruction of Nuremberg, he felt that it was made into a museum by all the labels on the buildings (for tourists).[132] While he wrote his dissertation on the traditionalist de Bonald with considerable sympathy, he saw traditionalism as a typical *modern* form of thought, where people "do not believe what they believe" (Péguy), but make it into a function of the self-preservation of the state (Charles Maurras's *Action Française*). It is a false form of teleology, sociologically subordinating faith and life under the conditions of its preservation.[133] Similar to Hegel, de Bonald (though a believer) saw God as a social reality, embedded and present in the structure of society, especially in language as a revealed and handed down reality.[134] From there it is a small step to the atheism of both Comte and Maurras: monotheism itself is a threat to society, because it is about a God who transcends society. Comte was not opposed to Catholicism, if it was

131. Following Löwith (and Carl Schmitt), he sees Christianity's role rather as the *katechon*, preventing progress from *destroying* humanity (ibid.).

132. Similar on the peasant world that he still experienced in his youth (*Gott und Welt*, 28f.).

133. Aesthetically, Maurras was a classicist, abhorring romantic or mystical ideas of honor, freedom, truth, newness of origination and so forth. He thought they were "Jewish" (expressed in the Magnificat, as well as by the *Dreyfusards*). But without these, self-preservation becomes as empty and sterile as classicism ("Politik zuerst?," 658f. and 662).

134. *Der Ursprung der Soziologie aus dem Geist der Restauration. Studien über L.C.A. de Bonald* (München: Kösel, 1959), 59 and 121.

atheistic and served the self-preservation of the state.[135] Earlier, he might have found open ears in Hobbes and Richelieu; it is a modern form of thought,[136] subordinating thought and faith to self-preservation.

The French Revolution, on the other hand, still genuinely believed in its goals, though it was stuck in an abstract negation of tradition. What Spaemann learned from Hegel and his teacher Joachim Ritter is that history (especially in the West) takes the form of *Entzweiung*—a peculiar split between tradition and emancipation from it. Spaemann lived both sides: in his early years he simultaneously considered entering a Benedictine monastery and joining the Communist Party.[137]

This historical bifurcation is nothing else than the "*disiecta membra*" of teleology: self-preservation and self-transcendence. Politically, they take the form of tradition and emancipation, of Realpolitik and Utopia, of the right and the left. We know already about self-preservation. But self-transcendence also has its failed forms. If it is in denial of its starting point in natural teleology, then it becomes emancipation as an end in itself and therefore without end: a "permanent revolution" that forces everything that is given and normal to justify itself. It is a process that can only be sustained by totalitarian governments and therefore ends in the dialectical opposite of emancipation (history is full of idealists who became cynics).[138] This totalitarian tendency can also be found in the aspirations of contemporary bureaucracies in the EU and elsewhere that try to enforce politically correct agendas and that are similarly forgetful of natural teleology as a necessary point of reference. But without this point of reference there really is no criterion for why we should call something progress at all, rather than regress. That is why the myth of "Progress" in

135. Comte tried to collaborate with the Jesuits ("Politik zuerst?," 657).

136. Spaemann contrasts this with Joan of Arc, who made Charles VII abdicate to receive his kingdom back from God. Though later he built a standing army, i.e., the modern order of war in peace times, as a technique of self-preservation ("Jeanne d'Arc," 377). This also corresponds to a primacy of foreign policy ("Die Schwindsucht des Spinoza," *Wort und Wahrheit* 8 [1953]: 787–90).

137. He was quickly disillusioned. Later, he and the Marxist Group on campus wrote flyers against each other. They liked him.

138. *Kernschmelze*, 98.

the singular and in the abstract has taken the place of particular and identifiable processes about which there can be argument and negotiation. True progress requires continuity, or else there is not anything that does progress. As a mere negation of the past, progress is a stopping point, not progress.[139]

So, both sides of the bifurcation have their own dialectic. They cannot be the end of the story. Hegel suggested that philosophy comes after this dichotomy. One cannot stay with the abstract negation of the past, as in the French Revolution or in adolescent rebellion; one must integrate both. But the outcome cannot be anticipated, it comes in hindsight and is articulated by the philosophers: "the owl of Minerva begins her flight at dusk."[140] Anticipating the outcome is the outlook of utopianism or totalitarianism: war for the proletariat or the superior race, or using the atom bomb as the war to end all wars (Jaspers): all of these are again false wholes and false perspectives on life. In the name of this end goal, everything appears to be allowed (Lenin, Sartre), but the goal is never achieved, and disaster results instead.[141]

That is why, if in doubt, Spaemann opted for the tradition, for a certain kind of preservation against emancipatory transcendence. Among the ancient Greeks, a tyrant was not a conservative figure, but the one who prevented the people from continuing to live according to tradition. For Spaemann, the liturgical reforms after the Second Vatican Council were a point in case.[142] But so were the leftwing social experiments after the rebellions of 1968. He emphasized that the burden of proof is with the innovators:

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139. "Was ist das Neue? Vom Ende des modernen Bewußtseins," *Die politische Meinung* 27 (1982): 11–27. Hans Küng's "Project World Ethos" is another strange hybrid: it makes ethics into a project; but making this the aim of progress presupposes that the ethos does not yet exist, while it makes the project an ethical imperative. Ironically, this emancipation from the past for an unknown future is pursued in the name of self-preservation of the human race ("Weltethos als Projekt," *Merkur* 50 [1996]: 893–904).

140. *Gott und Welt*, 83–92; it is like eating for the second time from the tree of knowledge, as Spaemann liked to quote Kleist.

141. "Aufhalter," 575.

142. Like Maritain, Balthasar, and others, he was one of the "liberals," who were surprised to find themselves on the right without having changed their position.

they have to prove that they are not doing harm. He agreed with Hans Jonas's "principle of responsibility." Indeed, the liturgical documents of the Council made the same point,[143] they just were not followed. If he was a traditionalist, then not as a dogmatist, but as a skeptic of the claims of "progress."

More generally, the labors of our life are not for the sake of bringing about some utopian end state of history. It is rather to stave off the daily ruin, the entropy, the fallenness of our existence. In the philosophy of history, Hegel would represent thinkers that see history progressing in a "crescendo," the evolution of a final telos. Heidegger, on the other hand, will see history as a "decrescendo," characterized by "Ruinanz," falling from act to potency. Spaemann, somehow siding with Heidegger on this point,[144] is a thinker of entropy—a frequent topic in his writings. The laws of nature, the Ananke, guarantee destruction, not the good. The good is an effort against this tendency (and ironically creates more entropy as a consequence). That is why the good is rare.[145]

Entropy and Murphy's law are just common sense: there are so many ways to go wrong, and only one to go right (*bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu*); things are just more likely to go wrong. Spaemann insisted that, contrary to popular assumptions, there is no reason to exclude from this decay the future of technological knowledge.[146]

The world begins in emptiness and chaos ("the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss") and remains marked by it; it will end in the heat death of the universe. The Church too, is predicted to end in catastrophe and disaster (something Spaemann might have felt keenly confirmed

143. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 23. I.e., the old liturgy, the normal, does not have to justify itself. See "About Normality."

144. Zaborowski rightly notes that Spaemann never mentions Heidegger's influence on his thought, compared to others (Holger Zaborowski, *Robert Spaemann's Philosophy of the Human Person: Nature, Freedom, and the Critique of Modernity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 32f.). Perhaps it is because of a mixture of some deep structural affinities with disgust at Heidegger's person and politics.

145. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* V, prop. XLII, note.

146. We do not even know anymore how people built Stonehenge; *Kernschmelze*, 87.

in his last days). But in the end, the world is not the closed system that the second law of thermodynamics envisions: the resurrection is initiated from the outside, the heavenly Jerusalem comes from above. In the meanwhile, *le pire n'est pas toujours sûr* (Paul Claudel),[147] and ethics continues to be about self-transcendence rather than survival: in this battle, bravery is honored, even if the battle is lost; it has eternal significance, even if it fails survival. We should fear to lose our souls rather than fearing those who can kill the body. The role of the Christian is the role of the *katechon* (2 Thes 2:6–7): to hold back the Antichrist.

It is also the role the doctor, who does his work, knowing that in the end he is always defeated. The case of the doctor also shows us how we can go wrong more generally: for not everything is allowed in this battle. For example, there are two forms of violence that one can commit at the end of human life: using all technological means to preserve life, even where nature with its teleological structure has run its course, or else, if this fails, to remove someone actively from the living (euthanasia). What both extremes share is the felt need to *do* something (and Spaemann saw cremation as an expression and continuation of the same attitude that performs euthanasia: it is an active process of destruction[148]). If we do not believe that nature has a course on its own that we trust in its meaning, then we cannot allow it appropriately to run its course. We will not even understand the difference between taking someone off life-support and killing him, between "letting" and "doing."[149] The doctor typically knows this, for his role presupposes the role of nature in any case, in the process of dying as well as in the process of healing: if nature does not heal itself, then medicine cannot do anything; it only supports the process.

More generally, the two extremes of violence at the end of life can be called "cynicism" and "fanaticism" respectively. The

147. *Gott und Welt*, 36.

148. "Death – Suicide – Euthanasia," in *The Dignity of the Dying Person: Proceedings of Fifth Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life (1999)*; ed. Juan de Dios Vial Correa/Elio Sgreccia (Rome/Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 123–31.

149. E.g., "About Normality." About allowing to die, see, e.g., Spaemann and Löw, *Die Frage Wozu?*, 284f.

fanatic (or idealist) wants to get his will at any price; if necessary, he throws bombs. Theologically, he knows what God wants and is willing to use violence to bring it about. But he forgets that there are two wills in God: the antecedent and consequent will. As Aquinas explains, following John Damascene, in his antecedent will God wants the good for every creature, but his consequent will needs to take into account the interaction of these creatures when they are put together in the universe. Interactions will lead to suffering and death; God can have good reasons to allow these for the sake of the greater good (he is the only legitimate utilitarian). Aquinas agrees with Kant, though, that God will never use his rational creatures as a mere means to an end.

Fanaticism clings to the antecedent will, cynicism ("realism") anticipates the consequent will and has forsaken the open future by not even trying to change things, but rather bringing them about themselves. Yet even if *God* can *allow* evil for the sake of greater good, that does not allow us to *do* evil.

The correct attitude would be Christian resignation (well known from the "serenity prayer"): to follow God's antecedent will (or *Gebotswille*) as far as we can, but surrender to God's consequent will (or *Geschichtswille*) if he has decided otherwise. We should note that the sequence cannot be reversed: this is what Judas attempts. Judas is the cynic, while Peter is the fanatic. It is better to be a fanatic; the fanatic (unless he become a disappointed cynic) can still be converted.

Only in Christian resignation do we not presume on God's plan and will for our life. Both cynicism and fanaticism in the face of entropy are refusals of self-transcendence.[150] The surrender of Christian faith to God's providence, on the other hand, might be the only way to restore unity after the bifurcation: it can accept the givenness of nature with its teleology as well as the providential course of history without needing to grasp at the whole.

The skeptical work of the philosopher as Spaemann saw it was rather to work against both extremes to keep open those spaces in which we experience not so much the past or the future, but That Which Always Is, and which is not of our own making, but a form of self-transcendence. It is about keeping open that horizon in which we can awake to reality. It is the space that he

150. *Glück und Wohlwollen*, 106–09.

found as a three-year old in the monastery of Gerleve (his mother could not make him leave), and which he later rediscovered in the abbey of Le Barroux.[151] He was willing to fight for this space, against Nazis, liturgical reformers, Marxists, and moral theologians. But in the end, it was up to God. In conversation he said that, ultimately, he had only one wish: *that God is God*—even if he felt that, with the psalmist, we can also occasionally remind God that he ought to be God.[152]

Robert Spaemann's funeral card does not presume anything with regard to the whole of his life. His picture is juxtaposed with the verse "Auch dieser da war mit Jesus von Nazareth" ("this one, too, was with Jesus of Nazareth"): it is the perspective of the other on himself. But the one who says this is the maidservant at the charcoal fire, pointing to Peter shortly before his denial. The ambivalence is intentional.[153] Many pointed to Robert Spaemann in this way and he probably knew the temptation of denial (he had a horror of torture). As he noted, death can even save us from betrayal under torture: "if the days would not be shortened, nobody would be saved." His life was long, and he resisted the entropy that would lead us to betrayal. The maidservant turned out right: he was with Jesus of Nazareth, whose face (painted by G. Rouault) is on the reverse of his own picture. In Christian resignation (and occasional humor) he faced the entropy of old age and the disintegration of the Church and the world around him, but he was also glad that he did not have to face the things that he saw coming. Now he will be glad to see that God is God. □

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151. *Gott und Welt*, 14–17.

152. *Kernschmelze*, 100. He might have in mind *ST* I, q. 60, a. 5, c, which he quotes against both Fénelon and Bossuet. He also quotes Jaspers, *Daß Gott ist, ist genug.* The psalms accompanied him throughout his life, though he published his commentary only at the end. Since he did not want to make any theological or exegetical claims, he called it at my suggestion "Meditationen eines Christen"—meditations of *one* Christian.

153. Spaemann was always a very good and perceptive reader of Scripture; there is some thought behind this choice.