

IS TRUTH UGLY? MORALISM AND THE CONVERTIBILITY OF BEING AND LOVE

• David L. Schindler •

“[T]ruth and goodness are not ugly,
finally, because being is love and love is being,
and this is beautiful!”

[My readers] will respect the consistency of Christianity in conceiving the good man as ugly. Christianity was right in this.

For a philosopher to say, “the good and the beautiful are one” is infamy; if he goes on to add, “also the true,” one ought to thrash him. Truth is ugly.¹

Nietzsche’s statement seems to me to identify accurately the radical question of our time as it concerns truth: namely, whether truth is ugly. The present article seeks to clarify the sense in which this is so. I begin indirectly, by sketching the premises that indicate the more comprehensive terms of my proposal.

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* [=WP], trans. W. Kaufmann and R. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1987), n. 822.

(1) Father Luigi Giussani says that genuine morality occurs when “one’s behavior flows from the dynamism intrinsic to the event to which it belongs”; and that moralism, on the contrary, is “an arbitrary . . . selection of affirmations among which the choices most publicized by power will dominate.”² What Giussani describes as moralism is expressed in what may be called relativistic theories of morality on the one hand, and formalistic-mechanistic theories on the other. That is, moralism implies finally that moral truth is a matter of either arbitrariness or (mechanical) imposition from without, or both.

Pope John Paul II, in a teaching that in my opinion goes to the heart of his pontificate, says that “a body expresses the ‘person’.”³ His further statements indicate what this means: man realizes his essence “only by existing ‘with someone’—and even more deeply and completely—by existing ‘for someone’” (60). “The body . . . manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons. It expresses it by means of the gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence” (61–62). The pope identifies this internal aptness of the body for expressing love, or again this rooting of the body in love, as the “nuptial attribute” of the body (63; 67).⁴ The internal aptness of the human body for relation presupposes an “interior freedom in man” that rises above the level of the “instinct” characteristic of fertility and procreation in the world of animals (62–63), and this freedom signals the difference within the analogy of the human body—and of sex—in relation to the world of animals (63).

My first suggestion, then, is that genuine morality (as distinct from the spurious sort termed moralism) demands something like John Paul II’s nuptial body. The reality, including the physical reality, in which one has existence, must be internally-structurally open to freedom, if one’s moral behavior is to have the capacity truly

²“Religious Awareness in Modern Man,” *Communio* (American edition), 25 (Spring, 1998): 104–40, at 132.

³“The Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis,” in John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1997), 25–102, at 61.

⁴In this notion of the body as nuptial, we see the root of the pope’s rejection of the “physicalist” or “biologistic” moral theories that view the body as simply “pre-moral”: cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, 48. Not infrequently today, it is charged that this notion of a “nuptial” body is romantic: the present article taken in its entirety implies an argument in response to this charge.

to flow from the dynamism intrinsic to that reality. More precisely: if, as John Paul II insists, the attribute of existing with and for—the feature of gift—is characteristic of human freedom, then (physical) reality, in its original structure, must be open as well to these attributes characteristic of relation.

To put it another way: if (bodily) reality is originally-structurally closed to the gift-giving and -receiving event characteristic of human freedom—which is to say, if there is an original dualism between the order proper to (physical) reality generally and the order proper to morality (act and content)—, then morality in the final analysis can be little more than a phenomenon added on, arbitrarily hence mechanically, to (physical) reality. In such a case, moral action could have no organic “home” in the nature of things but would always-already be inclined toward a voluntaristic or instrumentalized or indeed “violent” manipulation of things—and I take this, in light of Giussani, to be the heart of moralism.⁵

Thus my first premise is that an adequate moral theory presupposes an adequate ontology, by which I mean an ontology already integrated by and into an adequate anthropology. Moral

⁵I should point out here that, although this initial claim indicates rejection of what may be called a “nonnaturalistic” moral theory, which would disjoin moral action (simply) from the order of nature (cf. Kant, for example), the claim does not for all that entail “naturalism”—according to which moral action stands in a simple deductive or inferential relation to the order of nature. In fact, the intent of my claim is that we need a moral theory that is neither nonnaturalistic nor naturalistic: a theory that understands morality—the gnoseological order of “practical” intelligence—to be irreducibly distinct from, even as it remains intrinsically related to, the order of nature, i.e., to the ontological order of “speculative” intelligence. My initial purpose here is merely to highlight the importance of rejecting nonnaturalism (see fn. 28 below).

Regarding the need to avoid naturalism, cf. Livio Melina, Juan Pérez Soba, José Noriega, “Tesi e questioni circa lo statuto della teologia morale fondamentale,” in *Area Internazionale di Ricerca sullo Studio della Teologia Morale Fondamentale: Materiali di Lavoro*, 2 (June, 2000), 11; and Livio Melina, “Cristo e il dinamismo dell’agire: bilancio e prospettive del cristocentrismo morale,” 12 (on the inadequate interpretation of *operari sequitur esse* that overlooks the originality of practical knowing). Cf. also my “The Foundations of Morality,” in *Act and Agent: Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development*, ed. by George F. McClean, Frederick E. Ellrod, David L. Schindler, and Jesse A. Mann (Lanham, Md: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy/University Press of America, 1986), 271–305.

theory, rightly understood, requires a notion of being which, already as a notion of *being*, is integrated by and into the realities of person and love: requires thus what is at once an anthropological ontology and an ontological anthropology, conceived in love.

(2) But we need to take note of the fuller implications of this premise. An ontology conceived in light of the pope's notion of the nuptial body, and thereby in relation to anthropology, entails claims also and as a matter of principle about the cosmos and culture. In other words, it entails claims about the space, time, matter, and motion ingredient in bodiliness, and about the institutions in and through which space, time, matter, and motion become human culture. The reason for this seems clear: if the body is nuptial, then the space and time and matter and movement ingredient in bodiliness must themselves already, that is, in their original structure as such, bear an aptness for nuptiality, or love.

The more comprehensive theological ground for this suggestion is stated by John Paul II:

By means of this "humanization" of the Word-Son, the self-communication of God reaches its definitive fullness in the history of creation and salvation. This fullness acquires a special wealth and expressiveness in the text of John's Gospel: "The Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is "flesh": the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The "first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15), becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also "flesh" (cf., for example, Gen 9:11; Deut 5:26; Job 34:15; Is 40:6, 42:10; Ps 145/144:21; Lk 3:6; 1 Pet 1:24)—and in this reality with all "flesh", with the whole of creation.⁶

My further suggestion, then, is that an ontology enriched by the notion of "nuptial body," a notion deepened further in light of the enfleshment of the Word of God's love, itself already indicates

⁶*Dominum et vivificantem*, 50.

(also) a distinct cosmology and indeed a distinct understanding of culture—of the human artifacts making up culture. For the point is that all of creation, including creation as extended by means of embodied human freedom into culture, is now seen to take its proper form finally in terms of a(n)(analogically conceived) nuptial body, which receives its ultimate meaning in terms of the incarnate Word, the first-born of creatures (Col. 1:15–18). This original ordering of the human body, or of cosmic “flesh,” does not deny but on the contrary presupposes the distinction between the orders of creation and redemption, and the need for analogy, but we will treat these points more fully later.⁷

In recent centuries, the liberal West, conceiving the relation among them as extrinsic, has customarily treated ontological and anthropological and cosmological and cultural issues separately from each other, cultural institutions being conceived as matters essentially of historical-social *practice*—as matters merely of the *practical use or application* of ontological or anthropological-cosmological theory rather than as themselves *always-already constituted (at least in part) by*

⁷Cf. the following statement by Hans Urs von Balthasar: “If the cosmos as a whole has been created in the image of God that appears—in the First-Born of creation, through him and for him—and if this First-Born indwells the world as its Head through the Church, then in the last analysis the world is a ‘body’ of God, who represents and expresses himself in this body, on the basis of the principle not of pantheistic but of hypostatic union. . . . [I]n his definitive form he takes up into himself all the forms of creation. The form which he stamps upon the world is not tyrannical; it bestows completeness and perfection beyond anything imaginable. This holds for the forms of nature, concerning which we cannot say (as in medieval eschatology) that they will at some time simply disappear, leaving a vacuum between pure matter and men, who is a microcosmic fruit of nature. To be sure, it is only in man that nature raises its countenance into the region of eternity; and yet, the same *natura naturans* that in the end gives rise to man is also the *natura naturata*, and the whole plenitude of forms that the imagination of the divine nature has brought forth belongs analytically to the nature of man. The same holds in greater measure for the creations of man in his cultural development: they too—they especially!—belong to him as the images which he has produced out of himself then to impress them upon the world and which have a continued existence in man by reason of their birth even when they have perished in time” (*The Glory of the Lord, I: Seeing the Form* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982], 679). The requisite distinctions between creation and redemption and eschatology, and between the human and non-human, are implied here, but of course need to be sorted out with greater precision in another context.

ontological and anthropological theory.⁸ The claim of an ontology integrated by and into a body conceived nuptially and, more radically, in light of the Word made flesh, changes all that.

In other words: mechanistic notions of space and time,⁹ a mechanistic physics and biology,¹⁰ a “*techne*” or technology conceived mechanistically,¹¹ political and economic institutions interpreted mechanistically (i.e., as purely juridical institutions or procedures or “systems” construed as originally empty of, or neutral toward, any notion of human destiny)¹²: all of these

⁸Thus cultural institutions are not merely objects of moral action, but in part already subjects of moral action, and this in a double sense: institutions are always-already constituted in part by human subjectivity, and hence are never neutral (towards human destiny); and there is a significant sense in which, as social-historical beings, we always-already indwell the institutions in which we live—this is in part what is entailed by an embodied freedom.

⁹Regarding the (analogical) sense in which space and time take their original form from within love—indeed, from within the trinitarian love of God himself—, see Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, V: The Last Act* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 61–95, esp. 91–95. It goes without saying that a rejection of mechanistic notions of space and time hardly implies a denial that things have ineliminable mechanical aspects. The issue, rather, turns on whether the personal order (i.e., love, hence what is more organic or organismic in nature) has a primacy, even within the mechanical aspects of (material) things. On this primacy, and the difference it makes, see the discussion cited in fn. 10 below.

The fundamental pertinence of questions regarding space and time to the issues surrounding discussion of modernity and postmodernity—and to the issues sketched in the introduction and section I of this paper—is indicated by Graham Ward: “If we wish to apprehend the postmodern God, we have, then, to investigate the project of modernity with reference to the shapes it gave to time, space, and bodies. For these shapes portrayed the face of modernity’s god—the god whom Nietzsche (following a suggestion by Hegel) pronounced dead” (“Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace,” in *The Postmodern God*, ed. by Graham Ward [Oxford: Blackwell, 1997], xv–xlvii, at xvii).

¹⁰See my *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 143–76, especially its brief discussion of the work of David Bohm and Wolfhart Pannenberg, 169–74.

¹¹See my “Homelessness and the Modern Condition,” *Communio*, 27 (Fall, 2000): 411–30, especially at 419–24.

¹²This view is expressed in the political order in the so-called juridical theory of government or religious freedom prevalent in certain interpretations of *Dignitatis Humanae*; and in the economic order in certain readings of the distinction between economics and culture (moral-cultural order) (for example, in light of *Centesimus Annus*) that construe this distinction to imply that an economic system as such is

presuppose a notion of being that has already and in principle failed to take account of the fact that the body in its original structure is nuptial and that the “flesh” of the cosmos in its original structure is apt for receiving the Word of Love—and they all just so far provide a reasonable “foundation” not for genuine morality but for moralism.

In a word, the overcoming of moralism presupposes a distinctive ontology which in turn carries a distinctive view not only of man but of precisely everything: of every aspect of every entity and artifact in cosmos and culture.

My summary premise, in short, is that an adequate moral theory requires an understanding of the whole of reality in terms of a primacy of (divine and human) persons and their (nuptial) love, analogically understood. If we are finally to overcome moralism, we must (re-)conceive being in its original structure, by way of analogy, in terms of the giving and receiving proper to gift, and this includes the being of flesh, of space, of time, of matter, of motion, and of all human artifacts (politics, economics, the sciences, and so on). The argument to follow takes the form largely of a further explication of the meaning of and warrant for these introductory assertions, in terms of the question evoked at the outset, namely, whether truth, and the good man, are ugly.

I.

Here, then, is the simple claim I wish to propose: the (putative) ugliness of truth implies that the order proper to being is fundamentally not one of love; and the (putative) ugliness of the good implies the reduction of morality to moralism. The ugliness of truth and the ugliness of the good, I wish to argue, are linked indissolubly with one another: both in the end presuppose an original dualism or disjunction between being and love. Both deny, albeit from different directions, that the *order* of being in its most primitive structure is coincident with the *event* of love—or more

empty of moral-cultural claims, which are then to be added to it. For a discussion of these “proceduralist” views of institutions, see my “Evangelizing the Culture of Abstraction: Christology and the Integrity of Space, Time, Matter, and Motion,” in *Pro Ecclesia* (to appear).

precisely, that being is order and event, even as love is event and order.¹³

Our task, then, is to show how and why this is so. That is, we must show that it is both possible and necessary to integrate (to affirm a unity-coincident-with-distinctness-between) the order of being and the event of love; and, further, we must show why this integration is most properly, in the final analysis, termed beauty. Having done this, we will give a brief account of the issue of moralism, recapitulating the sense in which the contemporary crisis as it concerns truth and the good is originally and comprehensively a crisis regarding the absence of beauty.

But first let us return briefly to Nietzsche, and acknowledge the obvious sense in which the thesis we are proposing appears to beg the thrust of his dictum as he understands it. For it seems clear that the burden of the text cited from *The Will to Power* is precisely that order and event indicate irreconcilable opposites: this is exactly why truth is ugly. Nonetheless, it will have to suffice here to recall the complexity of Nietzsche, who in other writings points toward a fruitful tension between order (scil. Apollo) and event (scil. Dionysus) (cf., for example, his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872]). At any rate, what I wish to propose is that the beauty of truth turns on an original and abiding tension between order or form and event, a tension that is fruitful rather than destructive because it derives from an original unity-coincident-with-distinctness between the two.

We should note further here that the modern West has responded to the issue raised by Nietzsche, not by having successfully overcome the disjunction between order or form and event, but rather in having settled for a superficial containment of the disjunction. Modern culture, in other words, has not so much provided an adequate answer to Nietzsche's dictum that truth is ugly as failed really to take notice of it. The reason is that modernity's original dualism of form (scil. intelligence, order) and event (scil. will, freedom) renders invisible the problem identified by Nietzsche. Lacking Nietzsche's sense (however finally unstable) of an original

¹³The rephrasing here is important, in order to avoid the identification of being and order on the one hand, and of love and event on the other. The precise point to be argued, in other words, is that being is at once order and event, and so is coincident with love, while love is event and order, and so is coincident with being.

mutual indwelling of form and event, modernity has not had the capacity to notice either that its form(s) lack(s) the life- and depth-giving quality of event(s) or that its event(s) lack(s) the order necessary to give event a non-arbitrary character. It follows that modernity has had scarcely any way of taking seriously the charge that truth and morality are ugly, or indeed of seeing that the charge goes to the very heart of current difficulties. In short, modernity effectively masks the crisis identified by Nietzsche.

Postmodernity, often (though somewhat misleadingly) in the name of Nietzsche, now removes this mask that renders our crisis invisible. Postmodernity re-inserts event into form; but it nevertheless does so without having sufficiently questioned the modern dichotomy between form and event, and, accordingly, without having—at least from the perspective adopted here—reached the root of the problem. Postmodernity, in other words, initially concedes the (modern) collapse of form into mechanism—into static self-identity—, only then to reject such a form in favor of the movement proper to event. But the point is that, on such a manner of proceeding, the (re-)insertion of event into form cannot but be violent: the ongoing differentiation introduced by movement serves to destroy the identity of form—the integrity of form *as form*—, precisely because the integrity of form is assumed, however unwittingly in agreement with modernity, to be originally exclusive of ongoing differentiation.

Thus postmodernity serves the important function of revealing to us that “nihilism stands at the door” (*WP*, 1). But my suggestion is that it does so mostly by bringing into the open the nihilism that is already implicit in our “most decent and compassionate [modern] age” (*WP*, 1). Postmodernity, in short, exposes the sense in which modernity’s form is static and lifeless identity (i.e., mechanistic), and modernity’s event is empty and arbitrary movement, but it does so effectively by annihilating form, leaving us in the end with what is only movement, indeed movement that, as formless, just so far leaves intact the terms of modernity.

Evidently, these few comments leave much to be sorted out. My initial purpose here, however, is not to offer an interpretation of Nietzsche, or of modernity or postmodernity, but simply to say enough further to clarify in relation to these the issue lying at the heart of our current crisis as it affects truth and the good, a crisis epitomized in what we have called moralism. We turn, then, to

explore more fully the meaning of the integration of order (being) and event (love) suggested above.

II.

A text from Romano Guardini sets the appropriate context for this exploration. “In the experience of a great love,” he says, “all that happens becomes an event inside that love.”¹⁴ The most radical and comprehensive meaning of this statement can be seen in terms of the revelation of God himself, in relation to the world he has created. That is, the whole of creation, everything in the cosmos, is an “experience” of God’s great love; and the whole of creation thereby becomes an event inside that love. It follows that the world, and everything in the world—its space, its time, its matter, and its motion: in a word, every aspect of the order of cosmic being and activity—is first and most basically a gift. Gift, as an expression of God’s love (of the trinitarian love whose *logos* is revealed in Jesus Christ) permeates the whole of cosmic being, affecting from top to bottom its very order.

Consider, for example, how even the material elements of the food prepared by the mother for her children take on the character of gift: that is, they are not merely *instruments* of her loving will. On the contrary, her love enters into the material-spatial elements in and through which she prepares the food. These—this time and space and matter and motion—become the very form of her love. Which is to say, these so-called instruments become rather intrinsic features—an intrinsic part—of the event of her love: they reveal, *by virtue of their own order now transformed by love*, the very face and figure of the mother. In sum, the very order of space and time and matter and motion, by virtue of being taken up into the event of the mother’s love, itself assumes—that is, precisely *as the order proper to space and time and matter and motion*—the shape of love.

But what obtains in the case of the meal produced by the mother’s love obtains all the more radically with respect to all the spatial-temporal aspects of the cosmos created by God’s love.

Our questions, then, are three: how does the theology-ontology of creation as sketched here indicate a convertibility, or

¹⁴Cited by Giussani, 137.

unity within distinctness, of the order or form of being and the event of love (III)? Why is this convertibility rightly identified, originally and in this sense most fundamentally, in terms of beauty (IV)? And how does the convertibility of order and love, with the peculiar sense of primacy this convertibility accords beauty, address the heart of our current culture's difficulties regarding (the very existence of) truth and the good: how does it help us overcome moralism (V)?

III.

I begin by returning to a point mentioned earlier: the doctrine of creation sketched here does not deny but on the contrary presupposes the distinction between the orders of creation and redemption, and, again, presupposes the need for analogy.

(1) Regarding the distinction between creation and redemption: when we say that created being images the love of God, we presuppose that the original aptness for God's love that is internal to creatures—albeit gratuitously given—from the first moment of their existence is distinct from the realized participation in this love deriving from the sacrament of Baptism and in turn the Eucharist. On a Catholic reading of creation, the creature, deeply disfigured by sin, nevertheless retains a continuity of its created nature precisely *within* the radical—infinite—discontinuity effected in the (sacramental) event of God's grace: the “not yet” of the creature, on a Catholic reading, is also-simultaneously an “already.” The paradoxical tension indicated here cannot be released in either direction without disastrous consequences.

Thus the pertinent point for present purposes is that, for all of the disfigurement introduced by the sin of Adam, and for all of the distinctions needed to protect the gratuitousness of God's invitation to creatures to share in his love, and the difference between the orders of creation and redemption, it remains true that the world was created by the trinitarian God of Jesus Christ and no other, and hence from the beginning was made in the image of this

God and no other (Col. 1:15–18).¹⁵ The pertinent point, in other words, is that the world in its entirety is an expression of the love of this God, and all of worldly being and existence thereby takes place “inside” the event of this God’s love. There is no being in the cosmos that is not, at its core, a being-loved—a being-loved that is itself simultaneously a being-loving. Created being is a being-loved that is at once apt for love and loves: a beloved that is at once a lover. To put it another way: created being is a being-given, hence a gift, which, in being-received, at once itself gives.

(2) An adequate notion of analogy is indispensable here. Evidently, love requires self-reflexivity and freedom, and hence is affirmed in the full and proper sense only of spiritual being or persons, and hence of human as distinct from sub-human beings. Nonetheless, all of cosmic being, by virtue of its creatureliness, shares in the nature of gift. As creaturely, being is *constitutively related to God, receives its being from God, and finds itself always-already in relation to other beings, in a rhythm of receiving and giving*. All of being, in this sense, possesses an event- or encounter-like character.

But, again, the crucial point is that all of being shares, *proportionately/analogously*, in the features characteristic of the human person: for example, interiority (implied in the receptive relation to God—and to others—that is constitutive of creaturely being); and (dynamic) relation to the other, hence community. Creaturely being at its root is “naturally” grateful and generous; and this gratefulness and generosity indicate the primitive and indeed most proper meaning of *causal* activities within and among cosmic entities.¹⁶ In a

¹⁵Cf. the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1701: “It is in Christ, ‘the image of the invisible God,’ [Col. 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4] that man has been created ‘in the image and likeness’ of the Creator. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God” [*Gaudium et spes*, 22]. Also pertinent here is the statement of John Paul II in his *Dives in Misericordia*, where he insists (also referring to *Gaudium et spes*, 22) that a “deep and organic” link between “anthropocentrism” and “theocentrism” (or trinitarian christocentrism) is perhaps “the most important teaching” of the Second Vatican Council (*DM*, 1).

¹⁶On the metaphysical, and hence not merely anthropological but also cosmological, meaning of these, cf., for example, Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982); and Balthasar, *Teologik*, I: *Wahrheit der Welt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985).

word, the *esse-in* of the creature is simultaneously *esse-ab*, *esse-cum*, and *esse-ad*.

All of this, in sum, signals not anthropocentrism but an analogically-understood God- and creation-centeredness.

(3) It is particularly important to see that creaturely being retains its substantial (self-)identity (*esse-in*), but only in dynamic relation (*esse-ab*, *-cum*, *-ad*). The relation between the (self-)identity of being and the (ongoing) difference introduced by relation to the other is direct and not inverse. Relation to others (to God and to other creatures in God) does not destroy the (self-)identity of creaturely being, precisely because relation to others already (“partially”) constitutes that identity: *what* being is is always-already, dynamically, inclusive of *relation to the other* (relation thus in some significant sense to *what* being is not).¹⁷ This constitutive relationality

¹⁷Cf. in this connection the statement of Chiara Lubich:

In the relationship of the three divine Persons, each one is Love, each one *is* completely by *not being*: because each one is wholly by indwelling in the other Person, in an eternal self-giving.

In the light of the Trinity, Being reveals itself, if we can say this, as safekeeping in its most inner recesses the non-being of Self-giving: not the non-being which negates Being, but the non-being which reveals Being as Love.” (“A Philosophy That Stems from Love,” *Communio* 25 [Winter, 1998]: 746–56, at 753–54)

This affirmation, which implies that what is “*beyond*” being (what being *is not*) is, paradoxically, intrinsic to what being itself *is*, is of course a decisive claim relative to both the modern and the postmodern problematic as posed by Nietzsche. In the end, it entails a reading of the analogy of being as an analogy of love, and conversely. For another view, cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Thus Marion states: “We describe these [the Eucharist and the confession of faith] as two facts that are absolutely irreducible to Being and to its logic, facts that are only intelligible in terms of the gift. In conclusion, *agape* appears only as a pure given, with neither deduction nor legitimation. But in this way the given appears all the more as a given” (xxiv). The argument of this paper agrees that *agape* can be a matter neither of deduction nor of legitimation in the strict sense—and for that matter agrees as well with much of Marion’s criticism of the metaphysical tradition of the *ens commune*, with its tendency toward an “objective concept of being” and its “abstract univocity.” It nonetheless seems to me possible to read the *esse/ens* distinction of Thomas, as interpreted both by Gilson and (somewhat differently) by Balthasar, as itself already affording the requisite space, precisely “within” being itself, for the radical difference or non-deducibility or indeed the feature of “beyond”-being

entails rejection of the mechanistic reading of the principle of simple (self-)identity ($A = A$), whereby relation (to what is different or other) is understood as extrinsic to identity, with the double consequence that identity is conceived as static, and difference as chaotically kinetic.¹⁸

The upshot of all this is stunning. What it implies is that being, in its original identity as being, is (also) more than itself and other than itself. Being's identity with itself and being's difference from itself are both, as it were, and however paradoxically, "inside"

characteristic of gift. Indeed, from a theological point of view, it seems to me legitimate to ask whether a creedal-conciliar Christianity—cf., for example, the *homoousion* of Nicea—does not suggest the direction of an answer to Marion's question regarding whether "the conceptual thought of God . . . can be developed outside of the doctrine of Being (in the metaphysical sense, or even in the nonmetaphysical sense)? Does God give himself to be known according to the horizon of Being or according to a more radical horizon?" (xxiv). It seems to me evident that the conceptual thought of God must be developed outside a doctrine of Being, insofar as that doctrine assumes something like an objective concept of being veering toward an abstract univocity. But this still leaves the question whether *all* doctrines of Being can finally be subsumed into this sort of framework. And until we answer this question, we cannot know whether in fact we need a more radical horizon than Being—or indeed whether such a horizon is even accessible to (or by) us. At any rate, I am not at all certain that Marion's book has successfully answered this question, although the present forum does not permit an adequate argument in the matter.

¹⁸Thus in my opinion Balthasar avoids the polarities indicated by Rowan Williams: "a model that suggests first identity or presence, next difference (resolving again into identity); and a model that suggests always an identity shadowed by a wholly unrepresentable otherness. Neither model, it could be said, allows easily for a difference that is both simultaneous and interactive, a difference that allows temporal change, reciprocity of action, and thus avoids the two different but depressingly similar varieties of totalization that might be implied by the polar models we began with" ("Afterword: Making Differences," in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, ed. by Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash, Graham Ward [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999], 173–79, at 174). It should be noted, however, that neither Williams, nor, for different but not unrelated reasons, the other authors in this volume—namely, Fergus Kerr in addition to the four mentioned above—think that Balthasar is successful in doing so: that is, in providing a theological language that can finally claim "to have gone beyond the sterile opposition of undifferentiated presence/identity on the one hand and unthinkable *différance* on the other" (177). But an argued response to the criticisms raised in these articles must await another occasion.

being.¹⁹ Being in its original structure—that is, always and everywhere, albeit analogously—includes not only self-identity, but (ongoing) difference: indeed, includes self-identity only as ordered from and toward—and just so far as “subordinate” to—the other, in relation to whom the self (ongoingly) differentiates itself.²⁰

The overarching context, meaning, and indeed methodological presuppositions for (1), (2), and (3) are indicated in the following statement by Hans Urs von Balthasar:

On the basis of [the] twofold, reciprocal a priori of philosophy and theology, [we must say that], while Christian theology’s adoption and adaptation of secular (Greek) philosophy did make significant

¹⁹For the argument here and also in sections IV and V below, I am indebted to David Christopher Schindler, “The Dramatic Structure of Truth” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2000); and to conversations with Schindler and Professor Adrian Walker.

²⁰This sense of “subordination”—or of asymmetrical order—in the self’s relation to the other is hardly a nugatory matter, particularly in light of modern (e.g., post-Enlightenment) culture: without such an asymmetry, how are we able clearly to distinguish, say, in relation to the orders of economics and politics, a self-interest which becomes “enlightened”—i.e., which is harnessed into *mutual* self-interest—from authentic generosity? And further, in this light, how are we able finally to distinguish a self-centered notion of “rights” from a genuinely other-centered notion of “rights”? It goes without saying that the term “subordination” has been and continues to be subject to abuse. For now, I would only offer two comments. First, how can we finally do justice to the Christian understanding of love (“He who loses his life”; “the last shall be first”; “unless you become like this child”; “I come not to do my own will but the will of the him who sent me”), if we assert a (perfect) symmetry—that is, reject all sub- or super-ordination—in the self’s relation to the other? But, secondly, in a Christian—i.e., ultimately trinitarian—framework, asymmetry of relation always entails an anterior unity: asymmetry is the original way of unity, even as the converse anteriority of unity always-already prevents the confusion of asymmetry with inequality (“subordinationism”). Needless to say, these two comments leave much to be argued. The point upon which I wish to insist is simply (a) that God’s self-revelation as a trinitarian comm-unity of persons, in Jesus, should provide the most basic horizon for such an argument; and (b), granting this, that the terms unity-coincident-with-asymmetrical-difference are more basic than—and just so far establish the original context for thinking through—the terms equality-inequality (for example, as these are conventionally understood in our post-Enlightenment culture). But, again, I am aware that to record these points is not yet to provide an argument—in relation to the serious issues raised, for example, by the authors cited in fn. 17 above.

advances toward a new understanding of Being in its totality, nonetheless there remained a certain “historical deficit of Christian ontology”: “What is distinctively Christian did not . . . ultimately refashion the anticipatory understanding of the sense of being.” The foundation of this ontology remained the question, “What remains?” (—substance in its identity), and “What changes?” (—what is accidental and in motion). If, within the horizon of Christology and hence of God’s self-revelation, the New Testament answer had been given: “What abides is love”, this would surely have resulted in the expansion of philosophy’s world-bound ontology. For love “abides” only by giving itself, right from its very first source, just as Jesus’ self-giving for the world shows that he is given up by the Father. . . . But “to give oneself” is not to lose oneself; it is the essential realization of oneself. *Ekstasis* and *enstasis* are one, simply two sides of the same thing. “If it is by going out of ourselves that we come to ourselves, if self-emptying is the dawn of authentic being”, it follows that “analysis and synthesis, being and happening, state and event, freedom and necessity” imply each other. “Giving does not retain what it has but contains what it gives.” In bolder terms it can be said that “self-giving preserves its identity by giving itself away. By relinquishing itself, it preserves itself. Through innovation (freedom, synthesis) it remains identical (necessity, analysis) . . . And this identity has its origin in the event, in the innovation of self-giving.” . . . The intelligibility of the “form” (*Gestalt*) comes from the way in which, of itself, it points to a manifold context of relationships. . . .²¹ In this context, “substance” is there for the purpose of “transubstantiation”, for “communion”.²²

The summary point of (1), (2), and (3), in light of this statement by Balthasar, is that all of being, in analogous ways, is

²¹This presence of *relations*, and just so far of *difference* (i.e., the differences introduced by such relations), indicates what is distinctive about Balthasar’s notion of *Gestalt*, relative to a more classical—e.g., Aristotelian—notion of form. In other words, *Gestalt* for Balthasar indicates a wholeness consisting of a form that itself always-already contains different relationships. On this, cf. the discussion in David Christopher Schindler, “The Dramatic Structure of Truth.”

²²*Theo-Drama*, V: *The Last Act*, 73–75. In the text cited here, Balthasar is discussing Klaus Hemmerle’s *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976), and all quotations in the text are from this book. Cf. also the following statement by Balthasar: “Accordingly, Christian theology has to hold on unswervingly to the fact that the God who manifests himself in Jesus Christ exists in himself as an eternal essence (or Being), which is an equally eternal (that is, not temporal) ‘happening’: when we ponder God’s being, we must not forget this fact for an instant” (*TD*, V, 67).

convertible with love, and that form and event are therefore united in their distinctness and distinct in their unity. This is so finally because “[a]ll earthly becoming is a reflection of the eternal ‘happening’ in God, which, we repeat, is per se identical with the eternal Being or essence.”²³ “Creaturely logic can only have a correct estimate of itself if it sees itself as participating analogously in an absolute Logos that traces its origin backward to the Father and forward to the Spirit of freely given love who pours forth from him and from him who is his Source. Formal creaturely logic, too, is grounded in the Trinity and molded by it.”²⁴

We should highlight what is clearly implied in these assertions by Balthasar: namely, that the integration of being and “happening” as he affirms it does not signal a collapse into any kind of “actualism,” which would entail a dissolution of being into “happening” (event, becoming).²⁵ On the contrary, such an “actualist” interpretation would remove the paradoxical tension that is the entire burden of his argument: movement—the event of love—does not destroy identity (substance), but on the contrary is the way in which identity realizes itself, precisely *as* identity. It is characteristic of identity—as conceived within an adequate ontology (illuminated finally by Christian revelation)—to be, always and everywhere, albeit analogously, inclusive of the (ongoing) differentiation introduced by dynamic relation from, toward, and with the other.

Thus in the end Balthasar’s argument indicates, not the reduction of the form of being to event or, contrarily, the exclusion of event from the form of being, but the “expansion” of the form of being: to include not only the identity proper to form but also the difference introduced by event (dynamic relation, movement), in a way that signals at once a dual unity and a unified duality of identity (“form”) and difference (“event”). Furthermore, for the reasons indicated—in light of a Trinity- and Christ-inspired ontology of love—the inclusion in being of (self-)identity and difference as affirmed here in fact implies a certain priority for difference: for (self-

²³Ibid., 67.

²⁴Ibid., 65.

²⁵Regarding “actualism” see, for example, Balthasar’s discussion of Nebel (and “Protestant Theological Aesthetics”) in *The Glory of the Lord, I: Seeing the Form*, 57–79.

)identity is preserved only *in giving itself away to the other*. The very unity of being includes a relation to difference that is asymmetrical.²⁶

IV.

We turn, then, to our second concern, which is to show how this (paradoxical) resolution of the problem of being and love, or again of form (“identity”) and event (“difference”), relates to the transcendentals mentioned earlier: the true, the good, and the beautiful.

We begin with the classical—scholastic—link of truth with the relation between intelligence or form and being (*adequatio mentis et rei*), a relation that has its *terminus ad quem* in the mind—or subject; and the link of the good with the relation between the will or appetite and being (*id quod omnia appetunt*), a relation that has its *terminus ad quem* in the thing—or object. According to this same tradition, beauty is understood to include the dimensions simultaneously of both intelligence (the true) and will (the good) (*id quod visum [cognitum] placet*). What is meant by the true, the good, and the beautiful as initially conceived here, in terms of the convertibility of being and love, form and event?

(1) Our first and basic response is that the true and the good, precisely in their original distinctness as true and as good, are always-already different by virtue of the convertibility of form and event. While it remains the case that truth is properly conceived in terms of relation to mind, and hence primarily in terms of form, the crucial point, in light of the unity within distinctness of form and event, is that truth is now seen to bear, precisely in its original nature as truth, an event-like character, a subjectivity, and a relation to will (freedom). Conversely, the good, while properly conceived in terms of relation to the will, is now seen, in light of the same unity-within-distinctness of form and event, to bear, precisely in its original nature as the good, a form, an objectivity, and a relation to mind.

There are, then, two main points that need to be highlighted here. (a) The true (intelligence) bears the good (freedom, desire) implicitly in its very *ratio* as true (intelligent); and the good bears the

²⁶Cf. fns. 17 and 19 above.

true implicitly in its very *ratio* as good. The true is always-already (also) good, and the good is always-already (also) true, *intrinsically and not merely by way of addition of one to the other*.

The first point, in other words, is that the true and the good in their original structure as such *each* imply an integration (or unity-within-distinctness) of object(-ivity) and subject(-ivity). This is important because, lacking such integration, we slip back into our original dilemma: that is, we slip back into a truth that is wrongly object-centered, hence mechanistic (objectivistic), coupled dialectically with a good that is wrongly subject-centered, hence arbitrary (subjectivistic); or to a formalistic intelligence coupled with an arbitrarily spontaneous freedom.

(b) But the second point, and it is a crucial one, is that, while the true and the good each involve a unity-within-distinctness between subject(-ivity) and object(-ivity), they do so in a *different*—precisely *asymmetrical*—order. The nature and importance of this different order comes into relief when we recall our earlier discussion regarding the relation between form and event, that is, as conceived in terms of (a Trinity- and Christ-inspired) love: namely, that form (identity) finds itself always-already in a dynamic relation that is *from* and *toward* or *for* the other. Given a convertibility of form and event conceived in terms of love, in other words, it follows that the object(-ive other) takes precedence over the subject (-ive self), within the always-simultaneous unity between the two. The subject-self, in its original unity with the object-other, actually realizes its form or identity as subject only-also in “subordinate” relation to (from and with and for) the object-other.²⁷

²⁷Now, insofar as truth in its original definition above indicates a kind of priority of the object(-ive), we might be inclined to say, as a consequence, that truth has a certain precedence over the good. But the crucial point, given a convertible or “circumincensive” relation between the true and the good, is that this precedence of the true over the good is precisely that of the true *as itself already good*, and indeed of the objectivity of truth *as itself already bearing the subjectivity of the good*. Thus, to any relative priority of the true, there corresponds a relative priority of the good, albeit within an asymmetrical ordering wherein the objective other has a certain priority. But that is the nub of the issue: the original *unity* of the true with the good, and of object(-ivity) and subject(-ivity)—and vice versa—is not reducible to either one of the terms of these pairs, but is a new “third” that we call beauty. And hence in the end it is not the true, but more exactly the beautiful, that has priority when we speak of a priority of the objective (i.e., insofar as it is originally *integrated*

(2) Nonetheless, one final claim also seems to me necessary if we are to carry these points all the way through—if we are, so to speak, finally to secure or guarantee them. This final claim concerns beauty. As already indicated, the scholastic conception of beauty sees it as inclusive simultaneously of both intelligence and will, and hence of the true and the good. What does this inclusivity imply with respect to what we just have posited as an integrated-mutual but asymmetrical relation between the true and the good?

My answer, most simply and basically, is that beauty is the transcendental that properly initiates, and sustains, the actual integration-within-asymmetry of the true and the good (of intelligence and freedom/desire), and indeed of the object(-ive) and the subject(-ive). What does this mean?

First of all, and needless to say, what we have already argued above remains true. That is, the true properly understood bears the good implicitly, in its very nature as the true; and the good bears the true implicitly, in its very nature as the good. Furthermore, this circumincession of the true and the good, on its own terms, already implies a double unity-within-distinctness of object(-ivity) and subject(-ivity), and indeed an asymmetrical sense of this double unity-within-distinctness. But if all this is the case, we are bound to press the question: why is beauty necessary, or important? Is it the case that beauty adds to the above conclusions only what is at best a kind of cosmetic overlay—with the result that our original question regarding the ugliness of the true and of the good finally has more rhetorical than real significance?

The needed response to this issue lies in beauty's characteristic integration of the true and the good. And the pertinent

with the subjective); and likewise it is not the good, but again the beautiful, that has priority when we speak of the different priority of the subjective (i.e., insofar as it is originally *integrated* with the objective). We elaborate further below the sense of the priority of the beautiful indicated here.

Here, then, is an important key to what seems to me Balthasar's integration of the Thomistic and Augustinian traditions. It is simply not the case, as is sometimes asserted, that Balthasar rejects the objectivity (or priority of truth) of the Thomistic tradition in favor of a (putative) Augustinian or Neoplatonic—or indeed ultimately voluntaristic—spirituality of love. On the contrary, as indicated here, Balthasar accords a simultaneous priority—albeit in a different order—of objectivity (truth) *and* subjectivity (goodness). And indeed he accomplishes this simultaneity, and thereby an *integration* between the two, in and through the third transcendental: beauty.

point is that integration, rightly understood, demands a relational “whole” that transcends even as it includes its “parts.” Thus beauty is rightly said to bear a wholeness proper to its own nature as beauty, the wholeness that actually integrates, and in so doing just so far always-already transforms, the true and the good. But what does this “add” to, or how does it qualify, our proposals thus far?

First of all, recall the term “implicit” in each of the above assertions: the true bears the good *implicitly* in its very nature as the true—and so on. Simply, beauty renders explicit, and thereby actualizes for the first time, what the true and the good on their own terms only imply. Beauty indicates the actual integration—actually *is* the integration—between the true and the good. It is the actual wholeness integrating these two in their mutual but asymmetrical relation. Beauty *begins* with the true always-already-as-good, *in its unity with* the good always-already-as-true. The result is a kind of paradox of reciprocal causality: beauty first gives us the actual wholeness consisting of a unity-within-distinctness of the true and the good, and in this sense is the first cause of the true and the good in their integrated convertibility; even as beauty, in its actual integration of the true and the good, itself presupposes the true and the good in their respective integrities, and in this sense beauty, precisely in causing the actual integration of the true and the good, is itself the effect of the true and the good!

The priority of beauty I wish to claim thus does not displace but on the contrary presupposes the priority of the true and the good in a different order. More precisely, beauty first effects and then sustains the actual integration of the true and the good, “guaranteeing” the integrity of each in their convertibility. But beauty does this only-paradoxically by remaining itself the effect of the true and the good from the beginning and all along the way.

In a word, recalling our earlier line of argument, we can say that beauty from the outset and of its own proper nature signals the integration of the true and the good in the double, asymmetrical, unity of object(-ivity) and subject(-ivity). The distinctive contribution of beauty to the true and the good lies precisely in the original unity between (the) subject(-ivity) and (the) object(ivity) that is coincident with a primacy of (the) object(-ive). This is the contribution to which we were pointing when we suggested that beauty really “adds” something to the true and the good.

The importance of this “addition” of an original aesthetic dimension to both the true and the good can scarcely be

exaggerated. Recall what we said earlier about the structure of love, which properly consists in a unity of the object(-ive other) and the subject(-ive self) coincident with a “subordination” of the subject(-ive self) to the object(-ive other). We can now see that beauty is the transcendental that first discloses both the object(-ive) (in its nature *as* object[-ive]) and the subject(-ive) (in its nature *as* subject[-ive])—and indeed the true as such and the good as such—as matters intrinsically *of love*.

In sum: beauty contributes to the true and the good the aesthetic dimension that discloses the original and most profound meaning of both the true and the good as love. Although the implications of this conclusion are many, it suffices here to note the sense in which the primacy of the aesthetic dimension in the original realization of both the true and the good entails the primacy of the contemplative—or, in more theological terms if you will, the primacy of a “*fiat*” that always first “lets the other be.” This primacy of the contemplative entails recognition of the object(-ive other), as emergent in the orders of both the true and the good, as originally an object *of love* encountered always-already *from within love*. The other, in other words, is recognized from the beginning, given the anteriority of the aesthetic, as already-inherently attractive, precisely in its otherness.

The consequences are profound and far-reaching: the subject-self’s seeing of the truth is never a matter first of controlling or dominating the other in the interests of the self but rather of always respecting the transcendence—and just so far mystery—of the other *as other*; and the subject-self’s seeking of the good likewise originates within the self’s movement toward the other in its otherness: that is, the self originally and most profoundly realizes what is good for itself only *in* giving itself away to the other *in its otherness*. Aspects of the point to which I am drawing attention here are well summarized in the following text from Balthasar:

If the *verum* lacks that *splendor* which for Thomas is the distinctive mark of the beautiful, then the knowledge of truth remains both pragmatic and formalistic. The only concern of such knowledge will then merely be the verification of being or laws of thought, categories and ideas. But if the *bonum* lacks that *voluptas* which for Augustine is the mark of its beauty, then the relationship to the good will involve merely the satisfaction of a need by means of some value or object, whether it is founded objectively on the thing itself giving satisfaction or subjectively on the person

seeking it. Only the apprehension of an expressive form in the thing can give it that depth-dimension between its ground and its manifestation which, as the real *locus* of beauty, now also opens up the ontological *locus* of the truth of being, and frees the striver, allowing him to achieve the spiritual distance that makes a beauty rich in form desirable in its being-in-itself (and not only in its being-for-me), and only thus worth striving after. This is what Kant somewhat misleadingly calls the “disinterestedness of the beautiful”: the evidence that here an essential depth has risen up into the appearance, has appeared *to me*, and that I can neither reduce this appearing form theoretically into a mere fact or a ruling principle—and thus gain control over it—, nor can I through my efforts acquire it for personal use. In the luminous form of the beautiful the being of the existent becomes perceivable as nowhere else, and this is why an aesthetic element must be associated with all spiritual perceptions as with all spiritual striving. The quality of “being-in-itself” which belongs to the beautiful, the demand the beautiful makes to be allowed to be what it is, the demand, therefore, that we renounce our attempts to control and manipulate it, in order truly to be happy by enjoying it: all of this is, in the natural realm, the foundation and foreshadowing of what in the realm of revelation and grace will be the attitude of faith.²⁸

V.

Thus the simultaneous but asymmetrical priorities of the true and the good in fact suggest, in their primitive meaning, different senses of the priority of beauty itself. With respect to the true: beauty takes priority in the original disclosure of the subjectivity inherent in the (objective) truth; and with respect to the good: beauty takes priority in the original disclosure of the objectivity inherent in the (subjective) good. And this double priority, further, coincides with beauty’s priority also in the original disclosure of the primacy of the objective other, in the realization of the true and the good. What do these assertions imply relative to the concerns noted at the outset of this article?

We began with the question forced by Nietzsche: whether truth and the good man are ugly. We focused this question in terms

²⁸*The Glory of the Lord*, I, 152–53. On the integration of the Thomistic and Augustinian traditions implied here, cf. the preceding fn (26).

of the distinction between genuine morality and moralism as defined by Luigi Giussani: genuine morality, in contrast to moralism, occurs when “one’s behavior flows from the dynamism intrinsic to the event to which it belongs.”²⁹ We then structured our argument in terms of a link between ugliness and moralism: the true and the good are ugly insofar as moralism prevails—or, again, insofar as behavior fails to flow from the dynamism intrinsic to the event to which it belongs.

In response to this issue, we then argued that behavior can truly flow from the dynamism of the event to which it belongs only if being and love are convertible with one another—or, more precisely, only if being is at once form and event, even as love is at once event and form. We argued further that this convertibility of being and love implies a convertibility—a double, asymmetrical, unity-within-distinctness—of the true and the good, and of object(-ivity) and subject(-ivity). Finally, we argued that it is beauty that first actualizes the true and the good *in the integration implied by their convertibility*. Beauty first actualizes the unity-within-distinctness of object(-ivity) and subject(-ivity) proper to both the true and the good, in a way that simultaneously accords primacy to the object

²⁹To return to the methodological problem that arises in connection with the overcoming of the dualism between morality and ontology lying at the heart of moralism: our argument establishes the required unity between these necessary to overcome this dualism or “nonnaturalism,” even as it simultaneously maintains the distinctness between them necessary to prevent the slip into “naturalism” (cf. fn 4 above). My argument, in other words, implies that the required unity within distinctness of ontology and gnoseology in the moral order has its “foundation” in the convertibility or circumincession of the true and the good, within the integration signaled by beauty.

Thus, relative to moral gnoseology, the good always-already implies the true, precisely in its distinctness as good. This means that there is an intrinsic relation between ontology and moral gnoseology, even as it is now unnecessary to go outside the order of moral gnoseology—that is, outside the order of the good as such—to see that intrinsic relation. Since (ontological) truth is always-already implicit in the (moral) good, precisely in the distinctness of the latter’s own proper order, the relation between (moral) good and (ontological) truth need not be established deductively or simply inferentially. Such a procedure would in fact overlook the convertibility—unity coincident with distinctness—of the true and the good. Further, then, since, as we have seen, beauty originally actualizes this convertibility of the true and the good, we must say, in the final analysis, that it is beauty that properly enables the overcoming, simultaneously, of both naturalism and nonnaturalism.

(-ive other); and this implies that it is beauty that first discloses object(-ivity) and subject(-ivity), the true and the good, in their original meaning as matters *of love*.

Hence our summary answer to the issue with which we began: truth and goodness are not ugly, and moralism does not obtain as the way of genuine morality, because being and love are convertible—because, again, being is at once form and event, even as love is at once event and form; and because beauty is properly the form-act in and through which the convertibility of being and love is originally seen, or realized as such. Thus, in a word, truth and goodness are not ugly, finally, because being is love and love is being, and this is beautiful!³⁰

Let us now summarize some of the main implications of this conclusion. The crucial point in the overcoming of moralism, or in meeting the charge that the true and the good are ugly, lies above all in the distinguishing characteristic of beauty which discloses the (object-ive) other as inherently attractive. It is in the nature of the aesthetic, properly understood, to reveal that the object (other) possesses a subjective depth, precisely in its original objectivity (otherness), even as it is of the nature of the aesthetic to reveal at the same time that the perception of this originally given subjective depth (and hence worth) of the object occurs from the beginning only through the engagement of the subjectivity of the perceiver.

To understand concretely what this implies, we can recall the form-event of the mother's love as sketched above in relation to the text from Guardini. Balthasar himself develops the point in terms of the

³⁰There is of course an enormous issue implied here that is nevertheless not formally treated in the present article: that which arises when we note that the love revealed in Jesus Christ includes the crucifixion. The question, in other words, concerns the sense in which being might be said meaningfully—however paradoxically—to “include” a love that is cruciform, and hence the sense, further, in which this cruciform love might be said—however paradoxically—to be beautiful. Can a love that is christological, finally, be aesthetic? Needless to say, this central issue requires extensive treatment, which nonetheless must await another occasion. For now it must suffice to say that what must be shown is how the love consisting originally in self-gift (“first kenosis,” as it were) is already “open” to the self-gift which, in the face of sin, takes on the “form” (formlessness) of crucifixion (“second kenosis”)—a “form” (formlessness) which thereby, and just so far, shares in the beauty proper to the original self-gift.

mother's smile.³¹ But the burden of the point in any case is clear in light of what we have just written—and our larger argument above. The mother's smile is not merely an ontic but an ontological reality. That is, the mother's smile reveals to the child from the outset that being (as such) is attractive: that the form of what is originally given to it is inherently desirable or lovable. The smile of the mother bears within itself a love (cf. John Paul II's nuptial-relational body) whose attractiveness, penetrating the child, elicits—and indeed just so far itself already bears—the first response of the child. As the rays of the sun penetrate the flower, drawing forth its bloom, so does the mother's smile reach inside the child and liberate the child's first loving-responsive behavior.

Here, then, is disclosed the original and deepest meaning of both the true and the good: the very (physical) being of the mother, in her smile, reveals to the child the original form of love—reveals form as originally love—, even as her smile reveals simultaneously that love at its origin bears (a) form. It becomes clear, in other words, in light of this fundamental relationship of mother and child, that human behavior has its origin in, and indeed is first borne by, the attractiveness of the other.

Here, then, is the death of any “pelagian” view of behavior, which would make one's behavior first an achievement of the self (and the death as well of any contrary view of behavior that would interpret this priority of the other in the original response of the self as a simple passivity: for the reasons given above, in connection with the original engagement of the subjectivity of the self). Here also is the death of the relativism which, finally, is a function of pelagianism: because and insofar as relativism presupposes the (wrong) priority of the self in the realization of the true and the good, making over both into matters first of human construction. Here, finally, is the answer to the romanticism and/or voluntarism often implicit in moralistic conceptions of the true and the good: the answer, in other words, to the charge that the order of being has nothing intrinsic to do with love (i.e., that love is “unreal”: romanticism), or again that love has nothing intrinsic to do with the order of being (i.e., that love is a matter simply of the will: voluntarism).

³¹*The Glory of the Lord, V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 615 ff.

All of the above judgments, in a word, follow from the original circumincession of form and love disclosed in the beauty of the mother's smile. The answer to the question whether the true and the good, or indeed being and morality as such, are ugly is contained in this circumincession. This answer, in its "foundation" and vast implications, is well summarized by Balthasar:

The communication of Being lies . . . simply enclosed in the child's wonder at reality with the first opening of its eyes: in the fact that it is *permitted* to be in the midst of what exists. This condition of being permitted cannot be surpassed by any additional insight into the laws and necessities of the world.³²

The experience of being granted entrance into a sheltering and encompassing world is one which for all incipient, developing and mature consciousness cannot be superseded. . . . The fact that [the child] experiences Being (*Sein*) and human existence (*Dasein*) (why should it make a distinction between the two?) as the incomprehensible light of grace, is the reason why it engages in play. It could not play if—like the beggar at a marriage feast—it had been allowed to come out of a cold and dark outside by the "grace" of a condescending mercy into a place to which it had no "right" (these are later experiences, for those who have become guilty, which remain only parentheses within the totality of human experience). It gives itself to play because the experience of being admitted is the very first thing which it knows in the realm of Being. It *is*, in so far as it is allowed to take part as an object of love. Existence is both glorious and a matter of course. Everything, without exception, which is to follow later and will inevitably be added to this experience must remain an unfolding of it. There is no "gravity of life" which would fundamentally surpass this beginning. There is no "taking over control" of existence which might go further than this first experience of miracle and play. There is no encounter—with a friend or an enemy or with myriad passers-by—which could add anything to the encounter with the first-comprehended smile of the mother. "Unless you become as a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven": this statement is a tautology. The first experience contains what cannot be surpassed, *id quo majus cogitari non potest*. It is an experience in which distinction slumbers in the unopened unity of the grace of love—at once *before* and *after* the tragedy of its dissolution. However, it prevails even there, because that which is a "matter of course" is not the "*de facto*"

³²Ibid., 633.

with its constraining and finite narrowness, but the graciously-opened whole in which every space is granted to tumble around as much as one wills: existence as play.³³

Existence as play: this, finally, is the answer to the charge that truth and goodness are ugly. □

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³³Ibid., 616–17.