

Towards the Reciprocity of Man and Nature: Receptivity, Normativity, and Procreativity

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SINCE THE beginning of his presence on earth, man has never been simply reactive, though his participation in the life of the planet has, for the most part and until very recently, been overshadowed by the geologic events of global power and movement in earthquake, flood, and the formation of land and seas, of mountains and plains. With the formation of cities and the growth of numbers, however, he has left a deeper footprint and a more definite profile on the surface of the earth than have many other life-forms, so that instead of the pre-historic *reactivity*, his presence is better remarked upon as *interactivity*. That interaction has played itself out through the more than two millennia of so-called Western culture and its antecedents in and through several paradigms or patterns that expressed the significance of the earth and the character of the relation of man to his global context.¹

If one considers the question of the origin of man and nature, he must either dismiss the issue as do the positivists such as Auguste Comte, who banished the questions from serious consideration as incapable of receiving a plausible answer or, on the other hand, one must look beyond both man and nature to a radically transcendent source resident in the most intimate center of things, the Source which religious consciousness acknowledges as divine at the heart of the more limited things we encounter. A varied sense of the limitations of man and his fellow-beings gives rise to the differing religions of the world. These religions give

¹ See my earlier reflection on the topic, “Paradigms of Nature in Western Thought,” in *Man and Nature: The Chinese Tradition and the Future*, ed. Tang Yi-Jie, Li Zhen, and George F. McLean (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989).

expression to fundamental belief systems within and among the various cultures of the world, validating human action and showing forth an ultimate meaning of human life. Insofar as the question focuses on the origin of finite things, it raises the issue of the existence of things grounded in the very Being of all that is and can be. God's own self-affirmation, given in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, reaffirms this primacy of Being in the words: "I am Who I am." However else this may be understood, e.g., as an affirmation, intended to clarify the singular and exclusive self-identity of the First Principle in distinction from the putative claims of other so-called gods, it has been understood as a proclamation of non-finite Being which, in creating the world, has given it and continues to give it the existence incorporated in the very reality of all being. In the words attributed to Gottfried Leibniz but implicitly present in the whole Biblical tradition, it addresses the issue: Why anything at all? Why not Nothing? And, finding no satisfactory answer in and among the world of finite things, including man, it points to the Infinite Being of the Godhead. Accepted in faith, Christian philosophers have set forth arguments that, while they have not penetrated the fully mysterious depths of such a God, have sought to validate the rational meaning and truth of such an Infinite Reality, present in the affairs of man and nature.

There can be no doubt that the link of such a God with the character of Being has been enriched by the Greek insight into Logos or rational thought. And it is such a participation of *logos* with *being* that was celebrated by Parmenides and others. The association of thought with being took several forms within Greek culture, none of them, however, as influential as the coupling given expression by Aristotle. If we can distinguish the condition of limitation from that of finitude, it is the limited character of the being we experience that engrossed Aristotle, thereby raising the limited character of being to the status of a primordial order, even to the inclusion of the gods within the sphere of being. Such a cosmos proceeded in its orderly way through the governance of several causes: first, the originating cause (*causa efficiens*), brought into being by other limited beings and basically by the movement of the heavenly bodies; secondly, that cause or principle by which things were formed in their nature (*causa formalis*), in accordance with which they exercised their proper being; third, the directive ordination towards the fulfillment of their given nature as the completion of their limited existence (*causa finalis*); and finally, where appropriate, the substrate or matter in which the other principles and causes played out their roles (*causa materialis*). The physicality of such limited being has, in our own day, tended to be identified with materiality, but initially in Aristotle it had a

broader meaning, indicating the natural or formal modality of such limited being. In all of this constitution of the world of limited being, one can recognize the primary and fundamental role of form and finality and, where appropriate, of materiality. It is this chiefly Aristotelian paradigm that celebrated the limited and primarily formal character of the natured beings and that played out their limited roles within the Greek cosmos. And it is this paradigm that continued to leave its own active imprint in various ways throughout the course of Western cultures, including Christian and Moslem cultures during the mediaeval period.

Receptivity

With Christianity and its biblical inheritance, however, philosophy was awakened to a deeper sense of the origination or the created world and to the final destiny of man as explicit themes of creation and redemption that, while properly theological, had a pronounced effect on philosophical enquiry itself. And so we arrive at the second paradigm of enquiry, the first being the Greek reflection on limited, though not explicitly finite, nature and man. For the arrival of Divine Revelation radicalized the issues of origin and finality in a way that, while it was not fully open to ultimate philosophical resolution, deepened the sense of philosophical enquiry. And with this deepening, what had been considered limited now came to be seen as finite, with an implicit and sometimes acknowledged sense of the Infinite. With that the entire question of origins was transformed, as was the status of the “limited” now become “finite.”² But with the elevation of Being to its derivation from the Infinite, even created being received a new context for its properties, now enumerated as the transcendental properties of being and summarized by St. Thomas in *QD De Veritate* I, 1 (*esse, essentia, unum, aliquid, verum, bonum*) and in the Commentary on Dionysius’ *On the Divine Names* (*pulchrum*). This deeper sense of the intrinsic character of being had already begun to be voiced by such thinkers as Boethius and came to a certain definitive maturity in the thought of St. Thomas. If the pervasive appeal to the four causes in Aristotle may be said to have provided for thinkers as diverse as Christians and Moslems a widely held and influential interpretive paradigm, centered upon *physis*, one might recognize in the transcendental an ontological complex that rendered the character of being through the elaboration of its inner and omnipresent constitution.

² It is just this that Heidegger had to deal with in denying the role of the Infinite in the texture of being, giving to Nothing (*das Nichts*) an indispensable and positive role of engaging Being (*das Sein*) in a correlative constitutive relationship.

While this ontological paradigm grew increasingly prominent and persuasive during the European Middle Ages, the development of fundamental paradigms did not stop there. As with other instances in the history of thought, with newly emergent problems the next principal paradigm to emerge was not the ontological depth inherent in things but the search for mathematical precision in the clear and distinct ideas of Descartes and the practical exploitation of nature in Bacon. So that if *physis* in Aristotle and *being* in Thomas signaled their first principle, one might understand the new initiative to be an enquiry into the natural constitution of things best exemplified in the mathematical empiricism of Newton. Indeed, the expansion of rational enquiry flowered in expansive ways in the early modern period, and one might even venture the opinion that, in many quarters at least, it has retained a position of preeminence even in our own time. There remains however, a further, less pronounced and less noticed fourth paradigm of rational enquiry: the new sense of historical development that has played out its role and without which I would undoubtedly not be writing this all-too-brief depiction of the development of thought in this historically appreciative way. One might look first to Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) [*La scienza nuova*, 1725; the *New Science*] for his critique of the dominance of Cartesian mathematicism and his appreciation of the role of history broadly understood in the foundational development of thought. It was not, however, until later in the century that wider attention was given to the historical character of thought, in scientific theories of evolution and, in the early nineteenth century Hegel's account of the development of thought itself, in which historical development played the paradigmatic role of first philosophy.

As we ourselves, immersed in a sense of historical development, look back over the twenty-five-hundred-year history of philosophy, and looking at the general character of its complex development, we might see in the foregoing account four primary paradigms of learned discourse that have served as first principles in the search for understanding: Aristotle's appeal to *physis* (understood not in our restricted sense of material being, but rather in the ancient sense of *eidōs*, essence or kind); followed by St. Thomas's and others' appeal to being (*ens, esse*); and then by the early modern concentration on the *mathesis* of motion in the natural course of things; and finally, the appeal to the current sense of historical development in the recapitulation of our human journey and that of the earth's as well.

Given these four claimants to the status of first principle, the question now arises: which of these deserves the right to bear the responsibility for such a primordial and foundational role? Each makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge and our life: (1) nature contributing to our

experience of the relative stability of the things we encounter without which we could not count on the constancy and regularity without which all would be in chaos; and (2) being which grounds the very existence of things; and (3) the precision and exactitude, often of otherwise hidden forces that underpin the very movement of things; and (4) finally the temporal sequence of our progress, without which we would be enclosed within singular and discrete moments of sheer presence, without the knowledge of that from which we have come and without the hope for our future outcome. Thus, in sum: *physis/eidos*, *ens/esse*, number/*quanta*, and time/event.

There are presuppositions underlying each of these contenders for first principle. The Aristotelian account of *physis* presupposes the ordered cosmos, the mechanistic world of modern science presupposes the system of laws, and the later historical principle describes, but does not account for or explain the presence of, the forces operating to produce it. Only ontology does not presuppose the underlying operative role of the totality, and—more important still—only ontology recognizes that the finite beings that populate the universe are themselves incapable of accounting for their own existence. In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar: “Nothing finite, even if realized [i.e., if actual], has ever come to be of its own. It has for its horizon a ground to which it owes its existence.” And again: “No worldly entities can attain the coinciding of essence and reality (*essentia-esse*), even in the case of consciousness, because it can never create its own reality but must accept a reality already given to it . . . grounded, not in itself, but in what is trans-essential.”³ That is, either the universe is inexplicable or we must search out its origin. Are we entitled to do so? How absolute is the demand to explain, to account for our own existence? And for the existence of others? If we set the question aside, we should ask: Why does it arise in us? If we do not face this question, then all meaning is ultimately stalemated, restricted to secondary matters that finally remain unaccounted for, and what we call the search for truth is left in abeyance. For we cannot rest in a question about the mere beginning of things; rather we must rest in a knowledge—however incomplete and inadequate—of their source, their origin; for without that we are left without the very accounting of meaning itself. Such a search is built into our expectation of the fulfillment of meaning.

The other three principles are pursuant of different questions: The nature of things (their *physis*) points up the way things are, not that or whether they are; the mechanism of modern science describes with

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilogue*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 50 and 49.

commendable and reliable exactitude the way things behave, the way in which they carry out the laws of nature; the history of things recounts how they have emerged in temporal progression. None, however, raises Leibniz's questions: Why anything at all? Why not rather nothing? It is being—and being alone—that even makes sense of the question.

Let us turn, then, to an enquiry into the inner constitution of this principle of origins, to seek out the radical power which underlies all that is. The term that comes to mind is actuality (*esse actuale*, *actus essendi*), that which stands out in contrast to nothing. The contrast of being and nothing occurs in our language and thought and in language alone—and not as in Heidegger's attempt to render the finite order absolute by giving to nothing a primary and positive role. For in the domain of being, nothing is simply the absence of being; it is not some counterweight that limits being. But we seek the power of being, of what it is to be, to exist (once again, to use our language, to stand out from, to ex-sist, one might almost say to in-sist), not simply to be present but to present itself. For this is the absolutely fundamental and radical presencing from which all else flows. In its primordial character it is derived from nothing else, and is a primal self-presencing, even as it loans itself to others as it shapes and grounds their limited participation in being. It is the absolutely first principle within the order of finite being: the originating receptivity and participation in that actuality that becomes its very act of existence (*actus essendi*, *esse actuale*) in which all else is grounded.

Normativity

Finite being, however, is not simply pure being, but—as we have already said—participation in the act of being. This discloses the radically composite constitution in the finite being: not, however, a co-equal duality of separate entities, but rather the way or manner in which the finite entity possesses and carries out its finite existence. For the second factor within each finite being is not another being, something-in-itself, but the manner or mode in which such being presents itself, as this or that limited kind of being—if you will, this “version” of being, its essence determining the entity to be what it is. Now, this apparent “duality” within each and every finite being is a very peculiar differentiation within finite being, and it is easily misunderstood.

One speaks of a “real” distinction between the essence and the existence constitutive of a finite being which might suggest that the essence is somehow a *res* in its own right, as possessing the wherewithal to be something in and through its own self-identity. This would make the essence into a kind of entity somehow existing in its own right and really

separate from its existence. But that would be to confuse a distinction with a separation. The issue is more striking than that, for while essence and *esse* are distinct within the constitution of a finite being, they are in no way separate, as though they formed two beings. Truly understood, they are not even “half-beings”: whatever that would be! During the early modern period, drawing originally upon Avicenna, it was not uncommon to speak of the “being of essence” and the “being of the existence” (*esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae*), but this gave to the term “being” something other than actuality. Instead, properly understood the distinction is meant to acknowledge the limited character of finite being, its non-identity with the infinite fullness of being as such. It possesses being only to a limited degree and in a certain way, that is, by participation, in accordance with a modality or way of being that constitutes the essence or nature of the finite being, its way of being as a limited kind of being, existing only in and through participation in the actuality of being with definite but limited characteristics that comprise the essence that defines and discloses what the thing is (*quidditas*), as a substantial way of being further modified by accidental qualities. The Latin does not serve us well, for if we speak of a real distinction we are tempted to posit existence as actuality and essence as something other, some thing else, whereas it is other from the act of being, but not something other in the sense of another thing. Even the more frequently used term “real composition,” which expresses the intrinsic relation between essence and existence in the composite being, may still leave the impression of two realities, whereas there is only one reality, the finite being.

It is important to notice that—in discussing essence and existence—we have passed beyond Aristotle’s limited being to a different and deeper order of analysis, passing from the limited to the finite order. With these three principles (*esse*, *essentia*, and *unum*) we encompass the primary make-up of each and every finite being. The unit formed by these first principles in the constitution of finite beings forms a composite of a singular kind. This composite transcends in its unity the sort of compound we find in chemistry, since in a chemical compound the principles of formation are additive, joining two already existent elements, whereas in an ontological composite the participation of essence in *esse* is reductive, drawing upon existence but not in its fullness. For the distinction of essence and existence gives expression to the limited character of the participated act of existence even as it “celebrates” its radically affirmative and positive character. And it is to the form of the finite thing, to its essence or nature, that we attribute those positive features that define its essential identity and character along with its association with its accidental attendants. Indeed,

it is to these that most ordinary knowledge of things pays attention, tending to accept its existential status without explicit comment. Kant gave only passing attention to the being of things, and even Husserl in his phenomenology gave methodical precision to his delineation of the essential character only of the phenomena of experienced essences.

To call the distinction “real” is to indicate that the reality (*res*) possesses a limited nature or modality and not the absolute fullness of being. This said, it remains to remark that the nature or form of a finite being, through its participation in *esse*, manifests positive features within its limited essence or mode that distinguish it from other finite beings as a way in which it differs from other beings. In sum, then, these three properties—existence, essence, and unity (*esse, essentia, et unum*)—are the primary constituent principles that form the ontological core of each and every finite being: the actuality of existence, the modality of its character or essence, and the union of the two in the singular finitude of each being.

With this intrinsic ontological unity one can speak of the integrity of each finite entity. The finite entity is not, however, in any way a closed totality, for it participates in a twofold manner in the being of others: first of all, as already indicated, it participates in the primordial and absolutely original Source of existence, and secondly, it engages in relations with other finite beings whose singular unities in various ways form a community of interrelated beings, a community of others (*aliquid*), all participating in the gift of existence, each in its own way or mode. For accompanying each singular being we find it in relation with others, with “something else” (*aliquid*).

With the co-participation of these four principles we have the primary make-up of the finite order of beings. One might speak of these four properties as constitutive transcendental principles comprising the community of beings. If we are able to speak of each finite being as singularly integral, and in a qualified way as complete, it is even more fulsome to acknowledge the integral character of the universe of finite beings. It is within this community that Aristotle’s *physei*, Newton’s laws, and Darwin’s evolution have their deeper ground, as each finite being plays out its own received and directive nature within a variety of environments, some native to them and cooperative, others in tension and even in conflict through their actualized differences. As each natured thing plays out its existence, their mutual co-presence and interrelationship forms the normative structure of the natural world, if I may so term it in a sort of pre-ethical sense of ordered activity (cf. the Greek sense of *mos, moris* as habitual action). In this way the things of nature act out the finality resident in their nature. And it is to this pattern of natured activity that the

positive sciences direct their inquisitive energies, with well-known results, in probing the intelligibility and truth of the ordered movement of finite things, what I have called their “normativity,” by which I mean their measured movements in accordance with a system of causal laws that flows from their inherent nature or essence. It is upon the regularity and repetitiveness of movement that we rely in our ordinary experience, even if we do not have, as scientists do, an intellectual grasp of the inner motivation and play of even the more familiar things of our experience; and it is trust in such regularity that provides the basis for ordinary as well as learned and scientific knowledge of natural behaviors, constituted as they are of the four primary transcendentals: existence, essence, unity, and alterity (*esse, essentia, unum, et aliquid*).

Procreativity⁴

At this point, we might set forth the remaining transcendental properties of being which enter the world with man. In a sense they are already present in nature, or rather, they are in waiting for the disclosure that comes about through human consciousness and human action and not through other existent things, as humans play out their presence in their relations with others and even with themselves. And with this, the values of the true and the good come into explicit play, and even—as we will see—so too does the presence of beauty.

For with the emergence of the human being a truly remarkable phenomenon occurs by which being itself discloses its inherent and intimate meaning and character, its universality, its original depth, and its actuality. For being is present in its actuality, at the very origin of all that is, and wholly comprehensive, but—if I may so put it—until man comes on scene, not yet comprehended by agents in the created world. Drawing upon the text of St. Thomas, Josef Pieper expresses it well:

I am speaking of the spirit's universality [and precisely in its intellectual activity] as essential to its very nature: the spiritual soul, in a certain sense, is itself “the universe,” *quodammodo omnia* [i.e. in a certain manner all that is, quoting Aristotle, *De anima* 3, 8: 431b; in St. Thomas, *De veritate* 1,1] and from the beginning designed “to correspond to all that exists,” *convenire cum omni ente*.

⁴ The term “procreativity” in my present use is not synonymous with original creation (*creatio*), in that the latter is reserved for the absolute coming to be of things, whereas “procreation” refers to the coming to be of things on the basis of already existent beings.

He concludes: "This very same totality of all *being* is the object also of the philosophical *theoria*. To philosophize means nothing else but to reflect on the *whole* of reality." And passing from the absolute universality of being to its originate actuality, he adds: "This power and potency to relate to absolutely everything that exists cannot even be called—strictly speaking—a quality, something that the spirit would 'possess': the spirit itself is this [active] potency, this relational energy oriented toward the totality of all things."⁵

These three characteristics: the open universality, its fundamental originality and its radical actuality and presence comprise the basic characteristics that are constitutive of all things, but such being is also intrinsically rich, containing within itself a treasury of properties, through which it discloses its inner character in and through what tradition has called the "transcendental properties" of being. And it is to these that I now return in order to disclose—and even to celebrate—the inner resources of being. We have already touched upon the constitutive properties of being in and through which each and every finite being participates: the reception of existence, the defining character of its essence, the unity of *esse* and *essentia*, and its relation to others. With the emergence of man, however, these very properties become open to explicit recognition. The "re-" in recognition is important, since the human capacity for understanding is not—in and of itself—creative in the primary and originate sense of that term. As a knower, no man is a creator, least of all of his own existence.

But he does open to the reception of other beings in a distinctive way that preserves their own being even as it situates that limited being in the universal and comprehensive context of all being, this is the open universality so clearly just described by Josef Pieper. And indeed, in coming to know the truth of things—no matter how deficiently and humbly—each of us releases other beings to their own inherent intelligibility. It is something so ordinary in our every day experience that we scarcely stop to wonder at the remarkable transformation that comes about in and through our knowing. I say "transformation" in a very paradoxical sense, however, for when we come to know the truth of things or of a situation nothing in the thing or situation is changed thereby, though an alteration may subsequently flow from and be based upon such knowing. What is central in knowing, however—even as it resituates things within the knower—is not any change in the essence or identity of the thing itself; quite the contrary! For any such change would falsify our knowledge of the thing. Rather, coming to know the thing is to re-cognize the

⁵ Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992; German original 1966).

thing in its intelligibility, in what it is, in its essential character as well as its accidental conditions. Moreover, one must be careful in speaking of situating the thing in the knower, even if one insists “in a non-physical way.” For in another sense the thing known is also “resituated” in the world within which it exists. We have here a double paradox that yields the truth of that which is. And this is—if I may speak somewhat poetically—for the thing to receive a new home. If the thing does not change in any physical way, neither does the knower, for—if this does not sound too playful!—an idea doesn’t weigh the millionth part of an ounce. We are in the intellectual domain of the spirit.

This is not in any way to deny the role of the body and its sensory powers in the processes by which we come to acquire knowledge, i.e. through the sensory receptors and the mental processes that are attendant upon and even contributory to the activity of knowing. As embodied beings, physical processes play a contributory role in our coming to know things. The engagement of the senses and the internal processes of the brain are necessary, though—in the strict sense—they are not part of the essence of what it is to know. If the actual physical being of the room were transferred physically we would become the room we sit in with some difficulty in trying to get out of it. And yet, paradoxically there is a transformation and we do become the room we sit in. This means that we must acknowledge that knowledge receives its warranty only with the identification of the knower with the known, if we are to legitimate any claim to coming to know the thing in its own being. The primary and ultimate test of true knowledge is this identification of the knower with the known, though failing the immediacy of such presence we may refer to memories of the thing, or trustworthy witnesses and even cogent reasoning. Nevertheless, the origin and validity of true knowledge lies in the presence of the known to the knower.⁶ So that we are able to say: Oh yes! I know who you mean when you speak of John, and of what you mean when you ask for a glass of water. Such humble examples

⁶ Not wishing to prolong my reflection, I put in this footnote a common objection to such a realist account of knowledge. It is said that knowledge is a photograph album in our mental reservoir, so that to know something or someone is to possess a reproduction of him or her in consciousness or memory. Ordinary language testifies to the difference. The author of a biography on Winston Churchill may know a great deal more about him than one of his cigar-smoking friends, but the difference is caught by the word “about.” For such knowledge is indirect, whereas the primitive friendship is contact with, an encounter with, the real person. If someone asks: Do you know so-and-so, I may answer: No, but I’ve heard a lot about him; this is indirect knowledge, which is validated only by the reality of the known.

remind us that there is much we do not know about the most ordinary of things, and some that we must simply be open to in faith. But the very nature and character of knowledge is assured as being opens itself up to us in these seemingly ordinary but really quite remarkable ways. For even in our ordinary encounters with things and persons, if we are open to receive them, they disclose themselves in their intelligible value grounded in and expressive of the illuminative power of truth. And it is this illuminative power of truth that lights our path in our encounter with others, persons and beings. To the four constitutive transcendental properties of existence, essence, unity and relationality, we participate in the first of the so-called relational transcendental properties of being.

But there is more in the way in which we address the things about us. For, if in knowing we seek out their identity, their meaning, their truth, we also relate to their value. Sometimes it is in a narrow sense, their value for us, that is, their utility. And so we relate to them as good, understanding what is good as what is simply and narrowly good-for-us. But that is not all that things have to “tell” us, and tell us about themselves. Two recent incidents have come to my attention that illustrate the range of our relationship to the things of nature. It is reported that several young men took great pleasure in the random shooting of ducklings in a pond, finding in it nothing but the pride of destruction. It is significant that authorities arrested the perpetrators for killing the young birds in violation of the protection afforded them by law. In a quite opposite action, we recently learned of zoo keepers in several North American cities who carefully nurtured members of a threatened species (of amphibians), and, upon the appropriate time and conditions, and with expert skill and care, transferred them to their traditional and appropriate habitat in the South American jungle. There are other such examples of such rescues in the Arctic and among avian species, certain types of bears; the list goes on and on and is testimony to a growing concern for the preservation of endangered species, not as serving the practical needs of a food supply or potential domestication, but simply in and for themselves as they enrich the variety of life-forms that have value in and for themselves, and sometimes as contributing to the general health of the environment. As conditions change, it is to be hoped that we too grow in experience and wisdom, and outstrip any reduction to utility, for the environmental crisis is leading many to ask: Are these creatures not good in themselves and not simply for the purposes we put them to for ourselves? That we derive pleasure from the contemplation of their interesting variety does not reduce our relation to them to one of mere utility, but to touch a certain depth in things that is rooted in their very being, as when we see beauty

in a sunset, or the charitable act towards another in need, and many other such matters that take us beyond our own immediate self-concerns. In this we see a truth and a god beyond ourselves and resident in others, and in their being. And there arises in us a movement of acceptance and even of gratitude that there are such things, even to agreeing that there be such variety of goods in the community of beings. Note that the variety of goods includes beings that—in the ordinary course of human affairs—either contributes nothing directly good for us, such as poisonous plants, vicious snakes and the likes, or are indifferent to our well-being. It is here that judgment is required and the freedom of response, so that, unlike the dynamics of natural things which spontaneously seek to realize their given nature, the human resident is called upon first to understand, i.e. to exercise the first of the relational transcendentals that pertains to knowledge and is to be governed by truth. This transcendental carries with it not only the intentional response to things but responsibility for how we relate to things. If all things are good in their being, this does not mean that all things good in their being are also—without needed qualification and judgment—indiscriminately good for us. We have been equipped to distinguish through the transcendental properties of being, through the true and the good, to respect all and judge the character of their relation to us.

Here, then, we touch upon the well-springs of the growing concern for the good of natural things that may not be—at least in some situations—good for us, thus acknowledging the universal and transcendental value that is inherent in being (*bonum*). Often our concern touches upon our own well-being, as in our present concern for the cleanliness of our atmosphere, the healthy condition of our foods, the positive use of medicines for our health. But beyond such legitimate self-oriented concerns—and even contained within them—we may have an opportunity to act in defense of other beings not immediately related to our practical needs. It is perhaps too much to recognize that the good inherent in all being comes to us in the presence of other beings, including those that have no obvious benefit to offer us other than their interesting variety?

Our concern for the various species that populate the natural environment, such as the types of fish, birds, animals, and plants that do not contribute directly to our food supply, do add an interest and sense of vitality to the environment. In this way we come to acknowledge, not only the truth and intelligibility of things and their value and goodness but also that more elusive transcendental property that is inseparable from the context of being, that is, the beauty of nature which releases an environmental concern from total absorption in the practical needs of

humanity and welcomes the presence of others in the world, others different from ourselves and in some instances indifferent or harmful to our safety and well-being. For there is a profound connection between the human beauty of art and the natural beauty of the world, and it is in both that we find freshness and joy.

In conclusion and summation, then, I have found in the thought of St. Thomas a key to a metaphysical understanding of the being of nature and man. For the first four transcendentals—existence, essence, unity, and relationality—form the community of beings. It is, however, with great appreciation that I find in the remaining three relational properties an explosion of meaning and value through the experience of the intelligibility and the good of being raised to explicit and thematic status. It is in the first four properties that we find the ontological core of being, waiting to be enlightened and transposed by what can only be understood as the human spirit, by which—while remaining true to the reality of being—releases it to its own intelligibility and in freedom to its own self-affirmation, even as it lifts that being to a higher level consonant with its inherent character as participating in spirit. In recognizing the non-physical re-presencing of being as it becomes known and valued, we let that being participate in the activity of spirit. Moreover, we enter upon that open universality that is the horizon of being as such; and with that we expand the horizon of our own search for the good. For what is initially an ethics of human freedom seeking to participate in the properly human good, now takes that ethics into a larger horizon that operates within a more universal concern for the truth and goodness of being, and that results in more than an anthropological ethics centered upon man and expands into a growing concern over the good of nature, so that it might well be called a cosmic ethics. N·V