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WONDERFULLY AND FEARFULLY MADE
*Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Metaphysical Significance of the Wonder of a Child and the
Fruitfulness of Human Sexual Difference*

by

Angus David Ingvar Reid

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Durham University

Department of Theology and Religion

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ABSTRACT

WONDERFULLY AND FEARFULLY MADE

Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Metaphysical Significance of the Wonder of a Child and the Fruitfulness of Human Sexual Difference

Angus David Ingvar Reid

Hans Urs von Balthasar promotes a concrete metaphysics whereby humans disclose the reality of being as a whole within their lives. Being's superabundant mystery is encountered and manifested in the beauty, goodness and truth of human interactions. This receives its fullest articulation in interpersonal love wherein created being shines most brightly as a loving gift of participation in divine being. For Balthasar, the human capacity to grasp and share being as whole, and so the task of metaphysics, rests in childlike wonder at being's radiant beauty. Against perspectives that laud the autonomous adult self, I develop this aspect of Balthasar's vision to defend the abiding significance of the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference. In this, however, I also critique Balthasar's views on the latter. I claim his univocal identification of the female with receptivity and the male with activity contravenes his metaphysics. Working critically within Balthasar's thought, I extend what is implicit therein: the relationships between mother, father and child, and male and female humanity primordially and paradigmatically communicate created being's fruitful openness to, and difference from, divine being. I maintain these relationships carry a mantle at once fundamental, fragile and full of promise. They inscribe in human nature a predilection for gratuitous wonder at being's beauty. I argue the male-female difference and child-parent relationship serve as co-principles of being's beauty. As such, they underpin the metaphysical expression of human fruitfulness which cannot, however, be limited to procreation and family, but is communicated in the richness of human creativity. Nevertheless, whenever these constitutive relationships are threatened so too is beauty and, therefore, being's goodness and truth, and the human vocation to love to the fullest. Here metaphysics receives its concrete measure of truthfulness in its ability to celebrate, safeguard and pass on the wonder of a child.

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Abbreviations

Works written by Hans Urs von Balthasar

Works comprising part of Balthasar's trilogy:

- GL1 *The Glory of the Lord, volume 1: Seeing the Form*. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982.
- GL2 *The Glory of the Lord, volume 2: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*. Translated by Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh and Brian McNeil, CRV. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984.
- GL3 *The Glory of the Lord, volume 3: Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*. Translated by Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon and Rowan Williams. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986.
- GL4 *The Glory of the Lord, volume 4: In the Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*. Translated by Brian McNeil, CRV, Andrew Louth, John Saward, Rowan Williams and Oliver Davies. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989.
- GL5 *The Glory of the Lord, volume 5: In the Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*. Translated by Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, CRV, John Saward and Rowan Williams. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991.
- TD1 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume 1: Prolegomena*. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.
- TD2 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume 2: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990.
- TD3 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume 3: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992.
- TD4 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume 4: The Action*. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994.
- TD5 *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, volume 5: The Final Act*. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998.
- TL1 *Theo-Logic, volume 1: The Truth of the World*. Translated by Adrian J. Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.

- TL2 *Theo-Logic, volume 2: Truth of God.* Translated by Adrian J. Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.
- TL3 *Theo-Logic, volume 3: The Spirit of Truth.* Translated by Adrian J. Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005.
- E *Epilogue.* Translated by Edward T. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005.

Other works by Balthasar:

- LAC *Love Alone is Credible.* Translated by D.C. Schindler. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.
- MW *My Work: In Retrospect.* Translator unnamed. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993.
- UBC *Unless You Become Like This Child.* Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.
- ExT1 *Explorations in Theology, volume 1: The Word Made Flesh.* Translated by A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.
- ExT3 *Explorations in Theology, volume 3: Creator Spirit.* Translated by Brian McNeil, CRV. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993.
- ExT4 *Explorations in Theology, volume 4: Spirit and Institution.* Translated by Edward T. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- ExT5 *Explorations in Theology, Volume 5: Man Is Created.* Translated by Adrian J. Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014.
- MTG *“Movement Towards God.”* In ExT3, 15-55.
- NE *New Elucidations.* Translated by Mary Thereslide Skerry. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986.
- P *Prayer.* Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986.

Works by other authors:

- ST* Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988.
- De Veritate* Aquinas, Thomas. *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*. Translated by Robert W. Mulligan, James V. McGlynn and Robert W. Schmidt. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952-1954.
- De Potentia* Aquinas, Thomas. *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei*. Translated by the English Dominican Fathers. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952.
- Metaphysics* Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, Loeb Classical Library. Translated by Hugh Tredennick. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935.
- Generation* Aristotle. *Generation of Animals*, Loeb Classical Library. Translated by A.L. Peck. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942.
- DST* Schindler, D.C. *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.

Statement of Copyright

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

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The thesis is dedicated to Jess and our son Jack who came into our lives as this project was drawing to a close and whose beautiful presence effortlessly expresses the fragile wonder and joyful abandon I struggled to articulate in words.

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 128 and 153.

Introduction

Jesus...said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven....'¹

Jesus celebrates children and the attitude of being like a child.² Hans Urs von Balthasar takes this as a basic anthropological principle. To be childlike is the 'original form, the Alpha' out of which every human receives what is needful for living towards their final form, 'the Omega.'³ Balthasar locates the significance of this beyond the merely human since he holds human beings disclose the nature of being itself. What it means to be human (anthropology) and the question of being (metaphysics) entwine in what Balthasar calls 'meta-anthropology'.⁴ From this perspective, metaphysics is no mere abstract intellectual pursuit but basic to being human. It concerns how each person encounters and expresses being's reality in their concrete lives. In Balthasar's eyes, the weight Jesus attributes to children and childlikeness is, therefore, crucial to the question: why is there something rather than nothing? This is quintessentially a child's question whose manner of asking bears the seed of its response and comes fully to itself on the wings of a child's wonder. Childlike wonder is the hidden yet ubiquitous way of journeying into being's inexhaustible mystery. Significantly, for Balthasar, the interplay of childlike wonder and ontological mystery does not just emerge once a child is sufficiently aware to ponder existence. Rather, the original form of each child's self-consciousness is fashioned out of wonder insofar as every child is awoken to self-conscious freedom by others.

The meta-anthropological import of childlikeness, therefore, is tied to the human relationships that are concrete conditions of possibility for each child's self-conscious existence. If the marvel of being is disclosed decisively, albeit embryonically, in the wonder of a child – both in a child's wondrous existence and its awe-filled experience of being – then this redounds upon sexual difference and the child-parent relationship. And, indeed, Balthasar treats as metaphysically significant the events of conception, pregnancy, birth and a child's awakening to self-consciousness through its parents' love. He assigns equal importance to the sexual and personal fruitfulness of human sexual difference. This metaphysical framework means human procreation is not merely biological. Neither are the germinal experiences of childhood, parental nurture and the interpersonal exchanges of love simply emotional or psychological. Nor are questions of sexual difference and the parent-child relationship just social, legal and cultural issues. While these perspectives are vital, they assume things about

¹ Matthew, 18:2-3 (NRSV). Cf., Mark, 10:14-16; Luke, 18:16-17.

² For other related passages, see Matthew, 18:10, 19:14, 21:16, 18:10; Luke, 2:46-47, 10:21; John, 1:13, 18; 3:3, 5.

³ *UBC*, 15.

⁴ *MW*, 114.

humanity and being. What Balthasar insists upon, however, is that these metaphysical and anthropological presuppositions, to avoid lifeless abstraction, cannot be separated from the child-parent relationship and sexual difference. Similarly, these relationships are impacted by how being and humanity are conceived of and judged to fit together.

1. Issue at Hand: Metaphysics and Sexual Difference

It is Balthasar's advocacy of the metaphysical significance of these constitutive human relationships that is the focus of this thesis. I expound and defend Balthasar's integral association of metaphysics with the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference. Yet, I show how this vision challenges Balthasar's own problematic account of male and female humanity. Let me expand.

In working critically within Balthasar's metaphysical framework, it is noteworthy that Balthasar does not systematically present his metaphysical schema in one place. Rather, it underpins and is developed throughout his vast oeuvre. This is important to highlight because part of the present task involves offering an interpretation of Balthasar's metaphysics.

To offer an outline of the key elements of the latter pertinent to this thesis, Balthasar grounds his account of metaphysics as meta-anthropology in a traditional catholic Christian theological understanding of being and human nature, a tradition he develops. This interweaves several components. First, created being is not mere factual existence but a superabundant actuality that accounts for everything's existence whose fullness actively shows itself in, beyond, but never without the concrete reality of actual beings. Balthasar employs the idiom of Martin Heidegger's ontological difference between Being (*das Sein*) and beings (*das Seiende*).⁵ He adapts this, however, to Thomas Aquinas' real distinction between existence, understood as the actuality of being (*esse*), and essence (*essentia*).⁶ Each being (*ens*) is a complex whole comprised of a dynamic tension between *esse*, the act whereby anything exists at all, and its essence, the act that constitutes what a particular being is.⁷

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 318.

⁶ John F. Wippel summarises the medieval debate regarding the real distinction. See "Essence and Existence in Later Medieval Philosophy," in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 385-410.

⁷ Echoing Balthasar, I use Aquinas' terminology of *esse* for being as pure actuality. I consider this coterminous with *esse commune*; that is, *esse* considered in general wherein all beings participate for existence. In the English translation of Balthasar's work this is rendered by the capitalised 'Being' for creation, whereas 'Absolute Being' concerns God. I understand *actus essendi* as concerning *esse* as participated by beings as the source of their essence's actuality. 'A being' and 'beings' concern subsistent entities comprised of *esse* and essence. This matches the singular *ens* and plural *entia* in Thomist terms. When I employ 'being', 'being itself',

Secondly, this distinction rests on the theological doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* where created being is a gift of God's diffusive love. Each being exists by receiving *esse*, and so its essential nature, as a gift of participation in the superabundant act of divine being (*ipsum esse subsistens*). As I explore below, Balthasar subscribes to an analogical notion of being (*analogia entis*) where the unity-in-difference between divine and created being expresses itself, in finite terms, as the dynamic between *esse* and essence.

Thirdly, Balthasar follows Aquinas and Aristotle in affirming that humanity's embodied spiritual nature has 'the capacity to view the world as a whole, indeed Being as a whole';⁸ is '*quodammodo omnia*' (in some manner, all things); and, '*convenire cum omni ente*' (meant to fit in with all being).⁹ Each human, by reflecting being within themselves in spiritual terms, encapsulates being's transcendence which underpins human self-conscious freedom.¹⁰ This informs the meta-anthropological task which 'takes man in his freedom as the key to understanding being – without, however, slipping into an anthropological reduction.'¹¹ This relationship means that '*human structures are able to illuminate the meaning of being in itself...*'¹²

While Balthasar clearly engages in abstract reflection, the foregoing aspects combine in his metaphysics' characteristically concrete focus. Early in his thought Balthasar states, 'these first principles cannot be abstract propositions, since it is precisely *not* on the basis of abstraction that we arrive at them: they must be concrete and immediate encounters, not only with the *laws* of Being, but with Being itself.'¹³ As will become apparent, the concrete is not identical to the particularity of an individual being existing in a specific circumstance in contradistinction to universal notions of essence or form. Rather, Balthasar attests to the intrinsic relationship between the universal and particular in actual beings open to *esse*.

or similar, unless indicated, I mean finite being in its complex dynamic between *esse* and essence considered in general. In Aquinas' idiom this is *ens commune*. For further explanation, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 120-137.

⁸ *GL5*, 615. Cf., *ST*, 1a.76.5 ad.4.

⁹ *De Veritate*, 1.1; cf., Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 431b21.

¹⁰ *E*, 39. See also *ExT3*, 17-18. Cf., Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo et al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1996), 98-102.

¹¹ Martin Bieler, "Future of the Philosophy of Being," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 26, (1999): 472.

¹² *DST*, 259.

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "On the Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20, (1993): 150.

Balthasar deepens this. Being manifests itself concretely according to the so-called transcendental aspects of beauty, goodness and truth.¹⁴ Against modern transcendentalism, Balthasar treats these not simply as aspects of human cognition. They are distinctions inherent to *esse* as it subsists in actual beings and are fully disclosed in spiritual nature. What further characterises Balthasar's thought is how this transcendental realism is rooted in and expressed as love. The transcendentals are key moments of love's self-giving and receiving reciprocity understood as being's very meaning. Within this scheme, Balthasar allots primacy to beauty. Beauty's importance is evident throughout Balthasar's work, most conspicuously in his trilogy whose order places beauty first. As Balthasar reflects, this is 'a primal decision which includes all later ones for the person whose life is based on response and decision....'¹⁵ Beauty comes first as the gratuitous showing of *esse*'s superabundant mystery in the inexhaustible concrete reality of the forms, or, in Balthasar's idiom, *Gestalten*, of actual beings.¹⁶ *Gestalt* is pivotal in Balthasar's metaphysical thought.¹⁷ It captures how any being appears as a concrete whole according to a distinct pattern which manifests the intelligibility and ever-greater mystery of their essential and existential reality. Within *Gestalt*'s self-transcending dynamic, the beauty of being's ever-greater mystery and openness to the divine appears concretely, inviting further discovery proper to the good and true.

Matching beauty's primacy is wonder at 'the miracle of being.'¹⁸ Wonder is not purely subjective. It is the whole subject's response to being's objective appearance as worthy of wonder.¹⁹ In this, humans are, for Balthasar, contemplatively receptive to actual beings in their irreducible difference and actively engaged with them, judging and interpreting each being against being's ever-greater reality. This involves an aesthetic judgement engaging not just the imagination, the will or the intellect but the entire person, and applies to every act of human cognition.²⁰ Metaphysics is, therefore, for Balthasar, a discipline that begins, abides and ends in wonder at being's beauty. Here he adapts Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Heidegger, amongst others.²¹ Such wonder invites us

¹⁴ *MW*, 115-116.

¹⁵ *GL1*, 17.

¹⁶ Unless stated otherwise, I use form and *Gestalt* interchangeably.

¹⁷ *GL5*, 339-407. D.C. Schindler states '*Gestalt* is, for Balthasar, the fundamental form of being and the ultimate vessel of meaning.' *DST*, 166.

¹⁸ *GL5*, 613.

¹⁹ *GL1*, 17.

²⁰ Cf. *GL1*, 164, 174, 179, 234, and, especially, 241-257.

²¹ *GL1*, 24, 71. Cf., Plato, "Theaetetus," trans. M. J. Levett and Myles Burnyeat, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 155d; *Metaphysics*, I.2.982b9; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), 1.3. On the significance of wonder, see Michael Funk Deckard and Péter Losonczi, eds. *Philosophy Begins in Wonder: An Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy, Theology and Science* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2011); and, Mary-Jane Rubenstein,

to the marvel of the 'First Thing: to what is apparently the most obvious, the most unquestioned of all things: sheer existence.'²² We must not presuppose being is fully understood. We are to interrogate it repeatedly; or better, let being interrogate us. Balthasar here sees metaphysics as charged with a commission to stand against the forgetfulness of being and beings.²³ Positively, this translates into the human calling to champion wonder and be 'guardians' and 'shepherds' of being.²⁴

For classical and medieval thinkers, however, metaphysics is patently an occupation of a mature mind. As Charles Taylor argues, this becomes fateful for how metaphysics is challenged in Western thought. The philosophy and social practices of modernity claim to dispense with metaphysics and its attendant wonder as make-believe. Against such childish ways is extolled the adult rational mind that deals with empirically verifiable reality and the ethical behaviour of self-directing individuals.²⁵ These modern perspectives have in turn been challenged as humanly imposed fictions. In their stead is proposed an immanent shaping of a world that liberates human creativity, giving rise to a profusion of different views of reality – so-called post-modernism. This is the culmination of modernity's narrative of maturation against a childish religious worldview. In this rejection of metaphysics, whether modern or postmodern, lies a dismissal of childlikeness and a child's dependence on others.

By contrast, as noted above, Balthasar defends childlike wonder. He attributes metaphysical priority to how each child awakens as a self-conscious spirit in wholehearted wonder at being's beauty mediated by sexual fruitfulness and parental love. This primordial event echoes Balthasar's primal decision to begin with beauty. It is a decision both bestowed and taken since a child's own decision for beauty is enabled by the parents' welcoming love. A child's dependence, therefore, is not opposed to, but constitutes, the freedom that springs from the human capacity for wonder. This animates all intellectual endeavour and free action, of the wise and unwise alike.²⁶ Insofar as everyone has been born a child and remains fundamentally a child, a metaphysics rooted in wonder belongs to everyone. This fleshes out Balthasar's metaphysical take on Jesus' injunction to celebrate

Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2008).

²² *E*, 45.

²³ *GL5*, 655. Balthasar draws on Heidegger's notion of *Seinsvergessenheit*. Cf. Martin Heidegger, "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 50-72.

²⁴ *GL5*, 656.

²⁵ Charles Taylor, "What is Secularity?" in *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer and Martin Warner (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 57; and, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 572-575; 587-589.

²⁶ *TL1*, 8.

childlikeness. Metaphysics should 'raise the banner' for childhood.²⁷ Christ lauds childhood as 'a paradigm of existence.'²⁸ This is vital to an adult maturity based not on 'self-glorifying autonomy' but 'humble service.'²⁹ Metaphysics thus conceived lauds attitudes self-evident to the child: 'self-reception from another and thanksgiving for the gift of existence..., yet without dispensing us of the burden of responsibility (which we retain as mature adults).'³⁰ Childlikeness is, therefore, not simply metaphorical.³¹ It is of catholic significance: to be childlike is indispensable for unveiling being's meaning, as are the relationships upon which each child relies for its being and freedom.

This brings us to the place of sexual difference in Balthasar's thought. To clarify, my focus is limited to human sexual difference as the concrete condition for a child's coming to being and its awakening in wonder to self-conscious freedom. In this, I do not mean to suggest that sexual difference is only about children. Sexual difference is no univocal reality understood one way according to a fixed pattern. I recognise it to be a multivalent reality encompassing a complex set of distinctions between, and interpretations of, biology, bodily differences, psychology, sexuality, reproductive capacity and social/cultural roles at the least. As Rowan Williams suggests, in critical engagement with Balthasar, even if we grant that sexual difference is a 'peculiarly focal case' of functional difference vis-à-vis reproduction this should not exclude other levels of difference that concern, say, the body or sexual desire.³² Williams also queries whether this functional, reproductive focus of sexual difference 'so overrides differences between diverse male and diverse female subjects as to allow us to assume a basic and defining polarity.'³³ While I agree on the importance of protecting the wealth of differences that converge on and complexify sexual difference, I question the implication that reproduction is merely functional or that a basic polarity need override other differences. Rather, with Balthasar, I affirm that the advent of a new child reveals something unique about the metaphysical significance of sexual difference's fruitfulness that is basic to protecting the fruitful difference at being's core.

The ambiguity of the question of sexual difference is apparent in contemporary Western culture. I examine some of these issues in chapter three insofar as they concern this thesis' metaphysical focus, especially how sexual difference is variously understood as a function of human essence or

²⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Presence of the Child," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, (2002): 796.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 796.

²⁹ *EXT5*, 214. Cf., *GL1*, 179.

³⁰ *EXT5*, 214.

³¹ *EXT5*, 216.

³² Rowan Williams, "Balthasar and the Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46.

³³ *Ibid.*, 46.

construct. It is here that we also meet the problematic aspect of Balthasar vision. Balthasar's metaphysical thought, as outlined above, supports a perspective where both essence and construct are located in the overarching perspective of being's fruitful superabundance. Balthasar espouses a dramatic notion of human nature as receptive to and actively expressive of being that depends on and creatively transforms human essence. The latter cannot be limited to a fixed essence if it is to do justice to the wonder of being. Indeed, Balthasar insists a metaphysical account of sexual difference goes beyond even integrating the biological, socially-constructed and essential into a creative self-defining dramatic notion of human nature. It must reach into being itself.

Despite this, however, Balthasar promotes an essentialist perspective when he identifies maleness with activity and femaleness with receptivity. The implications are far-reaching not least because Balthasar's views have been influential on the Catholic Church which, Balthasar asserts, alone protects the significance of human sexual difference.³⁴ Indeed, Balthasar's thought has been accused of supporting a politically-motivated enforcement of narrow gender roles within the Church and beyond.³⁵ More broadly, his views on sexual difference feed accusations he fails to recognize 'the liaisons between social power and knowledge.'³⁶ The disjunction between his views of sexual difference and metaphysics is jolting given the latter's depth. As Lucy Gardner and David Moss ask, '[i]s all this to founder on Balthasar's account of sexual difference?'³⁷

I take up this question's challenge. As Williams articulates it, Balthasar's account of sexual difference, 'tantalizingly both opens up revolutionary perspectives and intimates some very firm and traditional closures....' To address this, Williams urges 'more than an enlightened outrage at a rhetoric of sexual differentiation apparently in thrall to unexamined patriarchy....' A response should be made from Balthasar's 'own rhetoric' of 'the extraordinary affirmation of simultaneous and reciprocal difference that his account of...the relation of God to creation insists upon....'³⁸ In this spirit, I examine Balthasar's views on sexual difference from within his metaphysics. Nuancing Williams' comment on patriarchy, however, I wish to validate some of the outrage Balthasar's views garner.³⁹ A response of outrage need not be solely attributed to unthinking accusations of patriarchy but can arise from delving into being itself. This allows us to probe critically a 'central unclarity' in

³⁴ *NE*, 195.

³⁵ Cf., Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 121-144.

³⁶ Oliver Davies, "Von Balthasar and the Problem of Being," *New Blackfriars* 79, (1998): 15.

³⁷ Lucy Gardner and David Moss, "Something like Time; Something like the Sexes – An Essay in Reception," in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, ed. Lucy Gardner et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 100.

³⁸ Rowan Williams, "Afterword: Making Differences," in Gardner et al., *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, 177.

³⁹ Cf., Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality and the Transformation of Finitude* (London: Routledge, 2016), 28, 54n.66.

Balthasar's thought about sexual difference.⁴⁰ To hold fast to Balthasar's metaphysics, however, means such probing should proceed carefully to ensure that any clarity sought derives from a notion of being which holds together clarity and mystery, unity and difference, wonder and daily existence in contrast to a clarity that reduces the concrete to abstraction. The hope is to distinguish when the 'tantalizing' in Balthasar's thought about sexual difference serves the wonder attendant upon being's beauty; and, when it accompanies a problematic avowal of ambiguity pitted against the concrete.

2. Thesis Statement

Against this backdrop, I offer an apologetic defence of the metaphysical value Balthasar allots to the wonder-filled attitude of being childlike. I argue this requires a concomitant affirmation of the metaphysical significance of human sexual difference as the fruitful unity-in-difference whose fruit is a child awoken to self-conscious freedom as spirit through others' love. Balthasar does not fully or consistently develop this connection. As an apologia that is critical, I challenge Balthasar's rendition of human sexual difference, particularly how he identifies the female with receptivity and the male with activity. I argue this contravenes his metaphysical commitments. This criticism, however, serves my apologetic aim to defend the importance of the constitutive human relationships for a concretely-focused metaphysics.

I maintain the relationships of child-parent, mother-father, and female-male play this role as specific anthropological relationships that constitute and communicate the form of humanity's embodied spiritual nature in its openness to being as a whole. They represent concrete differences that in their shared fruitfulness generatively enact and disclose the differences that comprise finite being's analogical reality. More specifically, I hold that the male-female difference and the child-parent relationship serve this purpose as co-principles of being's beauty. They are crucial to warding off the evisceration of humanity's capacity for wonder at being. They provide the concretely human context wherein being's beauty, goodness and truth are safeguarded, handed on and fulfilled in the fruitful reciprocity of interpersonal love as being's meaning.

I delineate this status of the constitutive human relationships as primordial, paradigmatic, yet non-exclusive. They are primordial and paradigmatic because they impact every human person by virtue of their being born to sexual difference and awoken to self-consciousness by parental others. Each person is, as a child, shaped by how male and female jointly yet differently enact the fruitfulness of being's beauty, goodness and truth. This is not, however, to limit the most metaphysically significant

⁴⁰ Williams, "Afterword: Making Differences," 177.

human act of creativity to having and raising children. Rather, I claim these constitutive human relationships are also non-exclusive. They unveil the fruitful pattern of the metaphysical nature of human creativity. These relationships do not exclude but give birth to, underscore and are the concrete metaphysical measure and wellspring of the myriad ways humans enact being's fruitfulness beyond reproduction and family.

3. Theology, Philosophy and Metaphysics

Given this study's metaphysical focus, let me clarify how I employ a notion of metaphysics understood from a philosophical perspective informed by Christian theology. This echoes Balthasar's perspective. Metaphysics can, however, be interpreted differently. D Stephen Long suggests five possibilities:

First, metaphysics is a philosophical invective used against an imprecise use of language, which speaks of being or beings for which there can be neither verification nor falsification (metaphysics 1). Second, metaphysics is a totalizing discourse that presents Being as origin, cause, and goal and thinks everything within its structure (metaphysics 2). Third, metaphysics is the inevitable opening of a sign that exceeds its context (metaphysics 3). Fourth, metaphysics is the beyond that interrupts immanence 'in the middle' (metaphysics 4). Fifth, metaphysics is a beyond that secures the presence of any sign such that the sign is unnecessary. It is an objective, universal validation where a sign corresponds to a reality such that the reality could be known without the sign. In fact, the reality secures the sign and not vice versa (metaphysics 5). (Metaphysics 5 is the 'cartoon Platonism' post-metaphysical philosophy critiques and which can still be found in some post-Tridentine Catholic versions of the 'analogia entis.' Metaphysics 3 and 4 are also versions of the 'analogia entis.')

⁴¹

Balthasar's metaphysics combines the third and fourth definitions. He sits critically to the fifth definition, reflecting his dissatisfaction with Neo-Scholasticism. He implicitly disagrees with the first model which amounts to a metaphysical nominalism. As Fergus Kerr notes, this pits Balthasar against 'the standard conceptions of metaphysics in Anglo-American [analytical] philosophy.'⁴² Balthasar also challenges the rejection of metaphysics articulated in the second definition as associated with a post-metaphysical continental philosophy.

⁴¹ D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language and Truth* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), 9-10. For 'cartoon Platonism,' see William Desmond, "Neither Servility nor Sovereignty," in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 155.

⁴² Fergus Kerr, "Balthasar and metaphysics," in Oakes and Moss, *Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 224.

Rather Balthasar's metaphysics encompasses an immanent sense of reality opening to the transcendent, and a transcendence unveiling itself in immanent reality while remaining transcendent. This bespeaks philosophy and theology's inseparability. Without philosophy, theology suffers. Either it relies on 'a few dry, abstract concepts, or else, totally neglecting the philosophical foundations, it will improvise a rough-and-ready philosophical foundation for itself and will tend to draw support from ideologically-colored material which it has not thought through.'⁴³ To be 'a serious theologian', Balthasar says, one must be a philosopher immersed 'in the mysterious structures of creaturely being...'⁴⁴ This does not collapse theology into philosophy. Rather, Balthasar resists a premature foreclosure of what can be said about created being via a fideistic leap into theology. He also cautions against the opposite reduction of reality to human reason, however construed. Rather theology and philosophy aim differently but inseparably at the one reality of being.⁴⁵

Beyond the merely philosophical, however, theology provides a perspective on being based on God's free disclosure which enriches philosophical metaphysics. Indeed, regarding the question of being, Balthasar proposes a distinctive third option between a pure philosophy based on reason alone and a pure theology rooted in faith and revelation. Instead, reason is illumined by and moves within the light of faith wherein 'the light of Being can itself shine much brighter and deeper...'⁴⁶ It is this third approach that I adopt. While, therefore, a philosophical metaphysics is indispensable, theological reality deepens and transforms metaphysics.⁴⁷ This third integrated approach matches Balthasar's prioritization of beauty which 'forgetfully' crosses the boundaries of philosophy and theology – beauty appears 'to be so transcendent in itself that it glide[s] with perfect continuity from the natural into the supernatural world.'⁴⁸ That said, Balthasar is adamant that Christianity is 'the guardian of that metaphysical wonderment which is the point of origin for philosophy and the continuation of which is the basis of its further existence.'⁴⁹ Such vital wonder is underwritten by God 'who is pre-eminently the guardian and the shepherd' of the miracle of being.⁵⁰

⁴³ *TL1*, xiv.

⁴⁴ *TL1*, 8.

⁴⁵ Cf., *GL1*, 143; *TL2*, 159.

⁴⁶ *GL1*, 159n.9.

⁴⁷ *GL1*, 144-145.

⁴⁸ *GL1*, 34. Cf., John Milbank's distinction between Romantic and Classical Orthodoxy. The former opposes the objective pure reason of the latter, instead stressing how reason too participates in the divine as gift and cannot stand apart from faith and aesthetic judgement. See "The New Divide: Romantic Versus Classical Orthodoxy," *Modern Theology* 26, (2010): 26-38.

⁴⁹ *GL5*, 646.

⁵⁰ *GL5*, 636.

The foregoing dovetails with the discipline of fundamental theology which is concerned with the possibility of doing theology itself. As Balthasar says, it asks how God's revelation is perceived, received and enacted.⁵¹ Fundamental theology seeks to ensure that the truths of Christianity speak as a vital unity to the whole of human experience, including reason's quest. Without this the living kernel of dogmatic theology is not accessed and remains detached from the life of the intellect. Here theology will, as D.C. Schindler says, 'collapse into mere history, fideism, biblical positivism, moralism, or a program of social justice and political action....'⁵² This echoes Balthasar's criticism of an apologetics that piles up reasons for accepting Christian faith to force a clumsy assent.⁵³ Against these, philosophy and theology must continually return to transformative concrete encounters open to being's beauty. This insists that knowledge of truth cannot be gained by 'turning away from that which is concretely finite (a movement which seems so natural!), but in turning towards the phenomenal existent (*conversio ad phantasma*) as the only place where the mystery of being will shine forth for him who exists bodily and spiritually.'⁵⁴ Against, therefore, the claim that Balthasar proffers grace at the expense of nature – making nature a 'vacuole for grace'⁵⁵ – his concern for fundamental theology affirms Aquinas' insistence that nature is presupposed, healed and fulfilled by grace.⁵⁶ Nature is not abandoned but is where grace's transformation is encountered and enacted. Indeed, Adrian Walker identifies Balthasar's metaphysics as especially suited for the task of retrieving nature amid a cultural undermining of the 'distinction between the artificial and the natural, the made and the born....'⁵⁷

The different approaches to metaphysics reflected above represents how its subject matter, being, is variously conceived. As mentioned, Balthasar's metaphysics rest on the *analogia entis*. He is influenced here by Thomist thought, particularly Erich Przywara.⁵⁸ I examine this more fully in the

⁵¹ *GL1*, 125. Cf., *GL1*, 9, on the inseparability of dogmatic and fundamental theology.

⁵² D.C. Schindler, "Surprised By Truth: The Drama Of Reason In Fundamental Theology," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, (2004): 589-590.

⁵³ *E*, 45.

⁵⁴ *GL1*, 146.

⁵⁵ Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 52.

⁵⁶ *E*, 17-18. Cf., *ST*, 1a.1.8, ad.2, 1a.2.2, ad.1.

⁵⁷ Adrian J. Walker, "Love Alone: Hans Urs von Balthasar as a Master of Theological Renewal," in *Love Alone is Credible: Hans Urs Von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition, Volume 1*, ed. David L. Schindler (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 22n.14.

⁵⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 255-256. Cf., Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics Original Structure And Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2014). Michael Hanby, "Creation as Aesthetic Analogy," in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or Wisdom of God?* ed. Thomas Joseph White (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), 343, notes an 'impressionistic' unity

first chapter. Here, however, I offer some background to an analogical notion of being to emphasize that Balthasar's conception of being represents only one interpretation.⁵⁹ This can be contrasted to other notions of being that do not, however, allot the same degree of significance to beauty or the concretely human, least of all the wonder of a child and sexual difference.

The *analogia entis*, as Balthasar employs it, encompasses several distinct yet intersecting differences. There is, first, a transcendent or downward vertical aspect which reflects *creatio ex nihilo* and constitutes the fundamental distinction between God and creation as a matter of being. God's being is radically distinct from existing things as the source of everything's being; yet, God's transcendence underpins the radical nature of his immanence to all things as their source of being in their difference from God.⁶⁰ Secondly, from a more immanent or horizontal perspective, are the differences which constitute created being, principally, the distinction between *esse* and essence which comprises the basic metaphysical polarity of any actual being. The horizontal analogy's dynamic tension between *esse* and essence points upward to the downward transcendent or vertical analogy. Thirdly, representing a more comprehensive *analogia entis*, is the relationship between these immanent and transcendent analogies. The difference between *esse* and essence in created reality is related to the difference between God and creation. This is articulated in the definition of analogy promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council: 'between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying a greater dissimilitude.'⁶¹

These three aspects comprise, fourthly, a single complex pattern or form of created being which concretely encapsulates God's greater dissimilarity within every similarity between God and creation.⁶² This reflects Balthasar's sense of being's primal *Gestalt* which underpins the concrete *Gestalten* of created beings which shimmer with the light of the gift of God's ever-greater being. It corresponds to an aesthetic notion of the *analogia entis*. The dissimilarity, therefore, is not sheer

to Aristotle, Aquinas, Przywara and Balthasar's analogy of being. See also James V. Zeitz, "Przywara And Von Balthasar On Analogy," *The Thomist* 52, (1988): 473-498.

⁵⁹ Balthasar's aesthetic understanding of the *analogia entis* has influenced various theologians engaged with metaphysics. E.g., David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 29; and, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), xxiv-xxvi, 220-222; and, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 69-84.

⁶⁰ On creation's significance, see Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (London: Blackwell, 1988); David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), xvi-xix; 87-88; and, Simon Oliver, *Creation: A Guide For the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

⁶¹ Heinrich Denzinger et al., eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum: Compendium of Creeds, Definitions and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 269 (§806).

⁶² On the 'likeness' of 'form' and the analogy of being, cf., *ST*, 1a.4.3.

negative absence that places God wholly outside creation over against the concrete. Rather, it is a dissimilarity manifest within the similarity between God and creation according to a certain intelligible, self-transcending pattern of being that affirms the integrity and freedom of creaturely becoming in openness to being as divine gift shared with all beings. In human terms, this takes on the concrete pattern of wonder-filled loving truthful service.

Given the above, for Balthasar, the *analogia entis* patently concerns being itself. It is not merely about language or conceptual thought. Indeed, language and thought are inextricably bound up for Balthasar with being. This distinguishes him from perspectives influenced by analytical philosophy.⁶³ That said, the linguistic account of analogy is the immediate context where Aquinas distinguishes between a univocal, equivocal or analogical predication of names of God and creatures.⁶⁴ Here analogy is located between univocity, where a term is used in the same way of God and creatures, and equivocity where a term is used incommensurably. Regarding the question of being, however, it is not simply an issue of terminology.⁶⁵ Hence, as Aquinas stresses, there is an analogical likeness of being between God and creation.⁶⁶ Here too, the language of univocity and equivocity is applicable where the former indicates an identity of divine and created being, and the latter an oppositional difference. Balthasar interprets Aquinas' analogical understanding of being against a univocal sense identified particularly with Duns Scotus and William Ockham.⁶⁷ For Scotus, being is not an actuality beyond essence as it is for Aquinas, but an abstract essential yet indeterminate concept that spans both infinite and finite being. Here reason's univocal concept of being becomes an absolute beyond both God and creation that is isolated from concrete existing reality.⁶⁸ Another distinction, not made explicitly by Aquinas, is the dialectical sense of being. This is a richly ambiguous term.⁶⁹ In contemporary discussions about being, it is often used to denote a Hegelian dialectic where differences are subsumed into a higher dynamic unity.⁷⁰

⁶³ E.g., Ralph McInerney, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996); and, the earlier work of David B. Burrell such as *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) and *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge, 1986).

⁶⁴ *ST*, 1a.13.5.

⁶⁵ *TL2*, 84-85.

⁶⁶ *ST*, 1a.13.5, ad.1, 1a.4.3. Cf., Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2006), 110.

⁶⁷ *GL5*, 12-14, 16-21.

⁶⁸ Cf., Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 121-129.

⁶⁹ Cf., William Desmond, *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 236.

⁷⁰ Cf., William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2003), 79-101.

William Desmond provides a helpful summary of these different senses of being, contrasting them with a metaxological understanding of being, which is his term for an analogical sense of being.⁷¹

If univocity stresses sameness, equivocality difference, dialectic the appropriation of difference within a mediated sameness, the metaxological reiterates, first a sense of otherness not to be included in dialectical self-mediation, second a sense of togetherness not reached by the equivocal, third a sense of rich ontological integrity not answered for by the univocal, and fourth a rich sense of ontological ambiguity not answered for either by the univocal, the equivocal, the dialectical [*sic*].⁷²

Analogy has, therefore, to do with affirming difference and unity. The contrast with the dialectical is that the latter tends to subsume difference in unity. Indeed, John Milbank, refining Desmond's perspective, notes that the dialectical is problematic insofar as it affirms both a sameness treated as a univocal abstract unity and a difference understood as an equivocality between finite beings with no real mediation between them. This results in a split where we live univocally in our minds and equivocally in our bodies.⁷³ These different accounts of being, however, need not be mutually exclusive. As Desmond argues, an analogical/metaxological understanding of being affirms the truth and interrelation of the univocal, equivocal and dialectical senses of being without reifying them.⁷⁴

That said, analogy always involves an element of paradox because it insists being cannot be univocally fixed. There are also different types of analogy.⁷⁵ Indeed, as David Bentley Hart states, analogy can risk becoming equivocal.⁷⁶ Thus, for example, Przywara's formulation of the *analogia entis*, though influential on Balthasar, and cited by Karl Barth as the reason he did not become Catholic, does not represent 'the key to Catholic doctrine incumbent on all to use.'⁷⁷ Analogy is a middle, a between, that cannot be pinned down but requires ongoing exploration of likenesses and differences. This stresses the importance of continually attending to the presumptions underlying

⁷¹ Cf., Desmond, *Strangeness*, 256.

⁷² William Desmond, *Being and The Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 177.

⁷³ John Milbank, "The Double Glory, Or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Zizek," in *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davies (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2009), 218.

⁷⁴ William Desmond, *God and The Between* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 117.

⁷⁵ Thomist tradition witnesses to different interpretations of the analogy of being – analogy of proportion; analogy of proportionality; extrinsic/intrinsic analogy of attribution; and analogy of origination or causality. For an overview, see John R. Betz, translator's introduction to *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, by Erich Przywara, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2014), 38-39.

⁷⁶ David Bentley Hart, "The Destiny of Christian Metaphysics: Reflections on the "analogia entis"," in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?*, ed. Thomas Joseph White (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), 399.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Barth*, 39. Cf., Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, 2nd ed., trans. G. W. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 1975), xiii.

any account of being. One of Balthasar's distinctive contributions, I maintain, is that he holds the analogy of being finds its measure in concrete principles, particularly the unity-in-difference between male and female, and child and parent.

4. Outline of Argument

Given the foregoing, I aim to employ Balthasar's metaphysics to argue for the singular significance of the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference in fruitfully communicating being's analogical reality as love according to the transcendental aspects of beauty, goodness and truth. To this end, I offer an exposition of Balthasar's analogical account of being and its connection to the concretely interpersonal wherein being's unity-in-difference is encountered in wonder. Against concepts of the autonomous individual, I argue this metaphysical wonder reflects the abiding childlike, filial and interdependent character of human self-conscious freedom. Through this lens, I argue for the metaphysical significance of the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference. This puts Balthasar in opposition to many prevailing anti-metaphysical accounts of sex and gender. It also, however, motivates my critique of Balthasar's understanding of sexual difference. I both criticise Balthasar using his metaphysical framework and offer an alternative account of sexual difference that accords with the latter. Finally, I show how the constitutive human relationships represent the concrete metaphysical conditions for the centrality of beauty to a notion of being that finds its fullest expression in the love shared between persons and which opens to the wonder of God's gift of divine being in all things.

5. Critical Approach, Sources and Literature Review

In pursuing this, I follow Balthasar's metaphysical method as encapsulated in the motto to the *Epilogue*: 'Whoever sees more of the truth is more profoundly right' (*Wer mehr Wahrheit sieht, hat mehr recht*). Here 'less extensive views are integrated into more comprehensive ones.'⁷⁸ Balthasar distinguishes this from a Hegelian approach which asserts '*Die Wahrheit ist die Ganze*' (the truth is the whole).⁷⁹ This claims an absolute knowledge of being within a purely immanent reality which absorbs the transcendent. Such is the method of Hegelian dialectic or, as Balthasar calls it, 'evolution', where 'one breaks through to the new, while one cancels the old...'⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *E*, 15.

⁷⁹ Georg Wilhelm Frederick Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 11.

⁸⁰ *GL4*, 18-19.

By contrast, Balthasar's sense of seeing more enacts immanent reality's openness to a transcendent ever-more which, because it can be encountered precisely in its mystery, escapes absolute comprehension. Balthasar here criticises a false humility that renounces an ability to see the ever-greater whole by claiming 'less is more'⁸¹ This is problematic insofar as the accent falls on reducing the transcendent more to a less that is pure immanence, rather than acknowledging the more in the apparent less. Such a reductionism appoints itself arbitrator of knowledge's limits thereby precluding beforehand the possibility of any transcendence shining from within concrete reality. Balthasar judges such an approach has 'got beyond love.'⁸² By contrast, he affirms a method of integration of parts into an ever-greater whole; a whole that is, however, a matter of freely bestowed divine gift that both exceeds and answers human nature's capacity for grace and evokes wonder.⁸³

To illustrate the implications of this for the present discussion, I refer to the disagreement between Karen Kilby and D.C. Schindler. Kilby accuses Balthasar of claiming access to an overall perspective on reality which places him in a God-like position.⁸⁴ In this, however, she undersells how Balthasar affirms the mystery of the whole that appears in the depth of the part which is itself an integral whole – just as an ecosystem is a whole that includes, say, an ash tree as a part which is also a whole-in-itself. Schindler, with justification, questions Kilby's appraisal of Balthasar's metaphysics.⁸⁵ It is notable, however, that Schindler is silent about Kilby's concerns over Balthasar's portrayal of sexual difference. Indeed, Schindler fails to acknowledge that Kilby here engages with the substance of Balthasar's thought despite his claims to the contrary. Also, while Schindler is a sympathetic interpreter of Balthasar's metaphysics, he does not directly engage Balthasar's understanding of human sexual difference. Furthermore, as I examine in chapter three, in Schindler's own metaphysical treatment of sexual difference he articulates a view congruent with Balthasar's metaphysics, yet, I argue, implicitly critical of Balthasar's views on sexual difference.

This latter claim accords with Schindler's own suggestion in his response to Kilby that it is 'indispensable' for 'Catholic (and catholic) thinkers' to critique Balthasar in light of a vision of the whole: where his perspective is limited, reductionist, exaggerated or oversimplified 'one does a

⁸¹ E, 43.

⁸² E, 16.

⁸³ GL4, 20; GL1, 20.

⁸⁴ Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 12, 113.

⁸⁵ D.C. Schindler, "A Very Critical Response" to Karen Kilby: On Failing to See the Form," review of *A (Very) Critical Introduction to Balthasar*, by Karen Kilby, *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 3, (2016): 68-87.

service to his thought to make whatever shortcomings it betrays known.⁸⁶ Whatever the merits of Schindler's critique of Kilby, he does her concern for catholic truth a disservice. It is insufficient, however, simply to highlight the shortcomings in Balthasar's thought. A more adequate account of the whole and its parts must be attempted. In this thesis, this means proffering an alternative to Balthasar's view of sexual difference. *Pace* Kilby, my criticism is that Balthasar fails to offer a sufficient account of the whole by focusing reductively on a part.

To employ Balthasar's method here means searching out being as it appears in the self-exceeding concrete whole of the essential and existential reality of human being. This pursues a knowing of things that simultaneously encompasses, first, their interiority, essential intelligibility and meaning; and, secondly, existential uniqueness and actuality – 'the common "whatness" and incomprehensible, irreducible "thisness" characterizing the actual world of elementary experience...'⁸⁷ In short, this involves a phenomenological approach (how the essence and existence of things appear to human consciousness which is only ever consciousness of things that appear); and, a metaphysical or analogical way of knowing (the human encounter with (created) being in and through actual beings).⁸⁸ As Michael Hanby says, 'in the dynamic interplay between essence and existence there is...a certain infinity within the being of the creature itself, that is phenomenologically and analogically visible, as it were, and that opens of its inner necessity into the gift of *esse* and the dependence of creature upon the gratuity of the Creator.'⁸⁹

Indeed, this engagement with the essence and existence of things rests on a basic judgement about how things fit together vis-à-vis the beautiful whole of being.⁹⁰ This echoes Balthasar's emphasis on the importance of an aesthetic-like judgement rooted in childlike wonder. It depends, moreover, on convictions about how humans know things, and so epistemology; and, also, the importance of language, speech, text and interpretation, and so hermeneutics. Indeed, it extends to include ethical consideration, community, society, artistic creativity and worship. Also significant are the importance of interpersonal relationships, and, indeed, sexual difference and the child-parent

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

⁸⁷ Hanby, "Aesthetic," 369-370.

⁸⁸ For an assessment of Balthasar's appropriation of phenomenology via an emphasis on gift, see Larry Chapp, "The Primal Experience of Being in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Response to Theodore Kepes Jr.," *Philosophy and Theology* 20, (2008): 291-305. Schindler, *DST*, 363n.48, stresses how for Balthasar there is no opposition between phenomenology and metaphysics. His metaphysics concerns the phenomenon of how being appears.

⁸⁹ Hanby, "Aesthetic," 376.

⁹⁰ Cf., John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 43: Since being can be interpreted variously, 'the judgement we make of it (Christian, Heideggerian, or otherwise), is adopted as, for us, the most compelling, the most manifest, the most intense.'

relationship, and, therefore, the significance accorded to adulthood and childhood. The key for Balthasar is that these all pertain to being's appearing. This method of engaging the whole, therefore, reflects the form and content of Balthasar's metaphysics. I attempt to show the credibility of the latter in its workings, doing so as an adult seeking to be faithful to childlike wonder at being.

For primary textual sources, I principally employ sections of the English translation of the sixteen volumes of Balthasar's trilogy, encompassing seven volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, five volumes of the *Theo-Drama*, three volumes of *Theo-Logic*, and the single volume *Epilogue*. The trilogy represents Balthasar's 'fundamental project', and the 'goal' of his life.⁹¹ He called it the 'heart' of his thought.⁹² The trilogy offers a sustained, maturing and deepening reflection on, *inter alia*, Balthasar's metaphysics. Here it is important to highlight that *TL1* is the earliest part of the trilogy to be written despite featuring as the thirteenth volume.⁹³ It therefore represents an earlier moment in Balthasar's thought. This is significant because *TL1* contains Balthasar's most sustained reflections on questions of philosophical metaphysics, only parts of which he develops subsequently. Hence, this aspect of his work has needed to be developed by later thinkers in a speculative key (see below).

More particularly, I engage those sections of the trilogy that relate to Balthasar's metaphysics, the child-parent relationship and sexual difference. Regarding his metaphysics, this includes, as indicated, *TL1* which offers a metaphysical, epistemological and phenomenological study of the truth of created being and its openness to God. Balthasar also develops his metaphysics in *GL1*, where he enumerates his central conception of *Gestalt*; *GL4* and *GL5* where he engages the Western tradition of metaphysics and articulates his analogical account of being; *TD2* and *TD3* which details his metaphysical account of human freedom based on a dramatic understanding of being; and, *E* where Balthasar further treats the *analogia entis*, the transcendentals and human self-consciousness' relationship to being.

I supplement these with texts where Balthasar examines the child-parent relationship. This is central to the final section of *GL5* where Balthasar presents the analogy of being according a fourfold difference which includes the mother-child relationship. The metaphysical value of a child's wonder informs the last book he wrote, *UBC*. He also explores this theme in *LAC*; *MW* where Balthasar offers periodical summary reflections on his work; *TL2*; and essays in *ExT3* and *ExT5*, particularly the essay *MTG*.

⁹¹ *MW*, 94.

⁹² *MW*, 111.

⁹³ *DST*, 9.

I place interpretative weight on *UBC* which has been considered Balthasar's legacy.⁹⁴ We can compare this to Aquinas' statement, made at the end of his life, about his massive output: 'to me it seems like straw' (*Mihi videtur ut palea*). Josef Pieper and Phillip Rosemann suggest this is key to understanding Aquinas' work, particularly the *Summa Theologica*. Pieper argues the latter's unfinished status is deliberate, not a function of Aquinas' untimely death. The *Summa* is a fragment pointing beyond itself.⁹⁵ Rosemann labels this a "negative systematicity" which involves 'not a system but a system: a system...deeply aware of its own inadequacy.'⁹⁶ I am proposing that *UBC* similarly offers a key to interpreting Balthasar's enterprise, that is, with a child's wonder-filled attitude. A crucial difference from the foregoing interpretation of Aquinas is that Balthasar offers in *UBC* not a system crossed out, but a fruitful fragment which manifests the inexhaustible whole. This echoes the title of Balthasar's monograph, *The Whole in the Fragment*.⁹⁷ Thus, Balthasar offers his work as a fragment where being's ever-greater mystery appears and is grasped through childlike wonder.

Regarding Balthasar statements on sexual difference, I use key sections in *TD2* and *TD3*, where he explores sexual difference as a central anthropological polarity. I examine other references Balthasar makes to sexual difference elsewhere in the trilogy. I supplement these with essays on sexual difference from *ExT5*, *NE* and from Balthasar's wider corpus.

The commentators on Balthasar with whom I engage are grouped according to their focus on his metaphysics or human sexual difference. Thus, firstly, this study's metaphysical focus is contiguous with recent scholarship that demonstrates the richness of Balthasar's contribution to philosophical metaphysics. This work distils and critically develops Balthasar's metaphysics, exploring its relation to his theology and anthropology. It seeks to offer correctives to mis-readings of Balthasar's work and places him in dialogue with Thomist thought.⁹⁸ I do not offer a comprehensive account of Balthasar's philosophical metaphysics, relying instead on others. Nevertheless, I seek to contribute to the speculative development of Balthasar's metaphysics given the importance he assigns to the constitutive human relationships.

⁹⁴ Peter Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 42.

⁹⁵ Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays*, trans. J. Murray SJ and D. O'Connor (New York: Panteon, 1957), 88-89.

⁹⁶ Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile: A 'Repetition' of Scholastic Metaphysics* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 225.

⁹⁷ The English version, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, trans. Franz Benzinger (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), obscures the original German: *Das Ganze im Fragment: Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (Köln: Benziger, 1963).

⁹⁸ Cf. Walker, "Love Alone", 20n.12.

In English, the most significant works on Balthasar's philosophical thought are those by D.C. Schindler, Nicholas Healy and Cyril O'Regan.⁹⁹ In other languages, the key works are by Juan Manuel Sara, Eliecer Pérez Haro, Mario Saint-Pierre, Pascal Ide, and Georges de Schrijver.¹⁰⁰ Other works are included in the bibliography. I particularly draw on D.C. Schindler's interpretation of Balthasar given his focus on the transcendentals and the child-mother encounter. It is noteworthy that explorations of Balthasar's metaphysical philosophy have not dealt comprehensively with his views on human sexual difference. I seek to address this lacuna.

Secondly, I consider commentators who treat Balthasar's understanding of sexual difference. Those who are principally critical include Karen Kilby, Tina Beattie and Linn Tonstad.¹⁰¹ Other authors, included in the bibliography, have engaged with Balthasar's understanding of sexual difference, ranging from the critical to the appreciative. Particularly important is an essay by Lucy Gardner and David Moss who consider how Balthasar's views on sexual difference relate to his theological application of the analogy of being and the Trinity, although they only briefly consider his wider metaphysics.¹⁰² Also, a monograph by Michele Schumacher defends Balthasar's understanding of sexual difference based on a Trinitarian anthropology in dialogue with Aquinas and Adrienne von Speyr.¹⁰³ Though Schumacher recognises the importance of metaphysics in adding coherence to Balthasar's theological imagery, she does not offer sustained engagement with this. While my criticism coincides somewhat with feminist critiques of Balthasar's view of sexual difference, it differs by being based on his metaphysics. I argue that where they clash, priority be given to Balthasar's metaphysics.

⁹⁹ DST; Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Being as Communion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Cyril O'Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity. Volume 1: Hegel* (New York: Crossroad, 2014). O'Regan is writing a second volume dealing with Balthasar's engagement with Heidegger.

¹⁰⁰ Juan Manuel Sara, *Forma y Amor. Un estudio metafísico sobre la trilogía de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Rome: Privatdruck, 2000); Eliecer Pérez Haro, *El misterio del ser: Una mediación entre filosofía y teología en Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Barcelona: Santanreu Editor, 1994); Mario Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité chez Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Quebec: Laval University Press, 1998); Pascal Ide, *Être et mystère: La philosophie de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1995); Georges de Schrijver, *Le merveilleux accord de l'homme et de Dieu: étude de l'analogie de l'être chez Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1983).

¹⁰¹ Kilby, *Balthasar*; Tonstad, *God and Difference*; Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006); "Sex, Death and Melodrama: A Feminist Critique of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *The Way* 44, (2005): 160-176; and, "A Man and Three Women—Hans, Adrienne, Mary and Luce," *New Blackfriars* 79, (1998): 97-105.

¹⁰² Gardner and Moss, "Something like the Sexes". See also, Lucy Gardner and David Moss, "Difference – The Immaculate Concept?" *The Laws of Sexual Difference in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,* *Modern Theology*, 14 (1998): 377-401.

¹⁰³ Michele M. Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology: Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar in Dialogue with Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

6. Chapter Outlines

The main section of this discussion considers Balthasar's metaphysics by circling around the focal point of the significance of a child's wonder. The first two chapters give an exposition of key aspects of Balthasar's metaphysics which serves as a framework for what then follows. The subsequent two chapters take on a more critical tone regarding Balthasar's interpretation of sexual difference and further develop the insights of Balthasar's metaphysical vision given the significance of the constitutive human relationships.

Thus, in chapter one, I assess Balthasar's understanding of metaphysics as beginning in wonder. I give an exposition of his analogical notion of being, focusing on how he characterises finite being according to a fourfold difference comprised of, first, the mother-child difference; secondly, how *esse* is distinct from beings; thirdly, the inverse difference between beings and *esse*; and, finally, the God-creation difference. This denotes the intrinsic relationship between the interpersonal, the metaphysical and the theological that undergirds Balthasar's concrete metaphysics where *esse* depends on beings, particularly human being, for its subsistence according to a pattern of letting be characteristic of love. This chapter furnishes the basic metaphysical perspective I employ critically in subsequent chapters.

In chapter two, I consider the central significance of Balthasar's account of the childlike and filial shape of human self-conscious freedom against modern and postmodern hostility towards childlikeness. I focus on how Balthasar's understanding that a child awakens to self-consciousness in wonder through parental love paradigmatically informs how human self-consciousness freely encounters and communicates the wonder of being via responses of the heart. The heart, for Balthasar, is the concrete core of the whole human person in their attunement to being. It encompasses a single complex act of the intellect, will, imagination, and senses. I show, moreover, how the heart is childlike and filial in its openness to being and beings. Accordingly, I consider how the acceptance or rejection of this is determinative for how human beings mediate being in their freedom as embodied spirits open to God's gift of divine being.

Chapter three employs the previous chapters' insights to explore the metaphysical significance Balthasar gives to human sexual difference. I approach the latter through the lens of its distinctive fruit: a child's born and awoken to self-consciousness. I set this against the backdrop of the legacy of Aristotelian metaphysics and contemporary debates over sexual difference and gender-identity. I argue that while the fruitfulness of human interpersonal love cannot be reduced to the fruitfulness of sexual reproduction, neither can it be divorced from it. While in the previous chapters I examine

how Balthasar knits together the metaphysical, the interpersonal, the childlike and filial, in this chapter I examine how these converge on an indispensable anthropological gateway: namely, the constitutive human relationships of child-parent, mother-father, female-male. The chapter includes a sustained critique of Balthasar's reductive account of sexual difference as outlined above. I show how this falls foul of Balthasar's metaphysical commitments. I also offer a revised account of sexual difference that is more faithful to the latter by affirming an asymmetrical reciprocity between male and female where they share a co-primacy in mediating being's fruitfulness.

In chapter four, I examine how the constitutive human relationships relate to being's transcendental aspects of beauty, goodness, and truth. I examine how the logic of Balthasar's thought means that the causality of the transcendentals encompasses a transcendental fruitfulness that analogically matches the pattern of fruitfulness disclosed decisively in a child's awakening to self-consciousness through its parents' love. I identify how Balthasar's understanding of metaphysics and anthropology converges on beauty's primacy and how sexual difference and the child-parent relationship are co-principles of being's beauty. They safeguard the overarching unity of the transcendentals as interrelated aspects of love. I revisit the previous chapter's findings in this light, expanding my critique of Balthasar's view of sexual difference and my alternative speculative account.

Although Balthasar's metaphysical vision means that questions of ontology, aesthetics, ethics and truth are inseparable, I limit myself to his notion of created being, finite spirit, the constitutive human relationships and their relation to the transcendentals. This study's findings, however, extend to ethical and cultural concerns raised by sexual difference, gender-identity, reproduction, and childhood. Accordingly, in the conclusion I consider some implications vis-à-vis safeguarding the wonder of a child in an increasingly technological age.

Chapter One

The Wonder of Being

Metaphysics, for Balthasar, is fundamentally concerned with the question: ‘why is there anything in the first place?’¹ This is distinct from, but vital for, the question ‘what are the nature and structure of being and beings?’ These ‘why’ and ‘what’ questions about being are inseparable. They are a particular sort of question that invites a specific response. They do not hinge primarily on rational speculation and judgement about realities abstracted or separated from the material world, but on the wholehearted human encounter with being as it appears in the intractable reality of beings. Balthasar assigns great importance to the first ‘why’ question. It is a question that is both an exclamation and a step on a journey into being itself. It carries the seeds of its response. This cannot simply be a determinate and fixed answer. It is a more-than-simply-determinate question which arises from and articulates wonder at anything existing. For Balthasar, the more determinate ‘what’ question about being and beings must be approached via this ‘why’ regarding anything’s wondrous existence. For the human subject, this aligns with the personal questions of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Why do I exist?’ Again, the answer lies embedded in the wonder and perplexity of each person’s lived response.

In this chapter, I expound how Balthasar draws these fundamental questions and responses together into an account of created being and the significance of interpersonal relationships to the latter. I focus on how this reflects Balthasar’s analogical notion of being where created being is inscribed with a dynamic relationship between unity and difference. Balthasar presents created being as encompassing a tension between, in Heidegger’s terms, being and beings (the Ontological Difference), yet interpreted along the lines of Aquinas’ real distinction between *esse* and essence (or *ens*).² For Balthasar, the manifestation of the actuality of *esse* in the concrete reality of actual beings is characterised by a reciprocal self-transcending ‘letting be’ that expresses being’s inherent excess. This opens to and participates in divine *esse* and manifests the freedom of God’s self-giving being as love within finite being’s difference from God. Taken together, this represents created being’s primal *Gestalt* – the ‘primal phenomenon’ of being.³

Within the creaturely realm, being’s primal *Gestalt* is fully disclosed in and as the primal form of humanity’s embodied spiritual nature and actions. Indeed, being’s primal form comes fully to light

¹ *GL5*, 613. Cf., Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Pathmarks* ed. W. McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 96.

² *GL5*, 446-447.

³ *GL1*, 19-20.

from within itself as spirit.⁴ Balthasar identifies the first occasion of metaphysical wonder at being's primal *Gestalt* with each child's awakening to self-consciousness and so to being itself through its mother's concrete love. This is the primal instance of Balthasar's distinctive vision of how metaphysics and anthropology interpenetrate according to created being's 'fourfold difference'.⁵ This represents what several commentators judge to be the centrepiece of Balthasar's metaphysical thought. The fourfold is comprised of the difference between mother and child; beings and Being (*esse*); Being (*esse*) and beings; and, God and creation. It straddles theological, ontological, interpersonal and anthropological categories.

In what follows, I treat each aspect of the fourfold difference as set out in *GL5*, offering thereby a detailed commentary on the metaphysical presuppositions of the primal *Gestalt* of an analogical notion of being as Balthasar understands it. This underpins the subsequent chapters' treatment of Balthasar's metaphysical view of the child-parent relationship, human sexual difference and the transcendental aspects of beauty, goodness and truth. To this end, I consider, first, how, for Balthasar, metaphysics begins in wonder. I then examine the fourfold difference. Finally, I treat Balthasar's conviction that the latter is characterised by the dynamic reciprocity of self-giving love or mutual 'letting be' between being and beings, and draw out the implications this has for the metaphysical significance of interpersonal relationships.

1. Wonder

In the final section of his critical engagement with medieval and modern Western metaphysics in *GL4* and *GL5*, Balthasar's articulates his unified metaphysical vision.⁶ The preface is entitled the 'Miracle of Being.'⁷ This reflects, first, what Balthasar considers, along with Heidegger, to be the authentic metaphysical question, 'Why is there anything and not simply nothing?'⁸ Secondly,

⁴ *GL1*, 22.

⁵ *GL5*, 613. I follow D.C Schindler, Nicholas Healy, and Fergus Kerr's preference for 'difference' rather than 'distinction' in the English translation of Balthasar's work. 'Difference' stresses how finite being encompasses four irreducible but inseparable aspects in a complex whole. See *DST*, 31; Healy, *Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 61; and, Kerr, "Balthasar and metaphysics," 235.

⁶ The German original encompasses two volumes with the same title emphasising the unity of Balthasar's critical appropriation of medieval and modern metaphysical thought. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik, Band III/1: Im Raum der Metaphysik 2. Teil: Neuzeit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1975)

⁷ *GL5*, 613.

⁸ For Balthasar's engagement with Heidegger, see *GL5*, 429-450. While he lauds Heidegger's attempts to reclaim the difference between being and beings, Balthasar holds that Heidegger ultimately makes the nothingness of (created) being an absolute, undermining genuine wonder. Balthasar thus gives only qualified assent to Heidegger's critique of 'onto-theology', the charge that Western metaphysics undermines the difference between being and beings because God is made both the highest being and the source of being. See Martin Heidegger, "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'," in McNeil, *Pathmarks*, 277-290; *Identity and*

Balthasar links this 'astonishing' question to the importance of wonder (*Verwunderung*). He identifies the metaphysical task with the guardianship of the wonder being evokes as manifested within actual beings.⁹ Echoing Heidegger, Balthasar affirms wonder as the beginning of thought and its 'permanent element'. Against Heidegger, such wonder is not just characterised by how humanity can 'wonder at Being in its own distinction from Being, but also that Being as such...“causes wonder”, behaving as something...striking and worthy of wonder....¹⁰ Such primal and abiding wonder at being is a fundamental aesthetic experience weaved into the fabric of thought. Balthasar thus foregrounds the human encounter with being's beauty, or more fully, glory.

Balthasar contrasts wonder with 'admiration' (*Bewunderung*).¹¹ Admiration becomes problematic insofar as it attends a sense of being wholly identified with the order of nature based on a scientific rational worldview. This is not wonder at there being anything but 'an admiration that everything appears so wonderfully and “beautifully” ordered within the necessity of Being.¹² It relies on an abstract identification of being and meaning in human thought – a univocal notion of being. Balthasar's concern is, however, that this can be attractive as a total explanation. It is not self-evident but relies on a wilful 'titanic' leap of faith that imposes this univocal identity. As Balthasar states, this gets 'the phenomenon wrong.'¹³ The problem is that it forecloses genuine wonder at being. Moreover, individual instances of beauty are sacrificed to the beauty of an abstract notion of the harmony of a necessary universal process or a Hegelian-type harmony-in-and-beyond-disharmony. Indeed, where this necessity is in turn questioned everything becomes a product of chance which, echoing Heidegger, opens the finite to the seeming terror and indifference of the infinite. Balthasar, however, insists the spirit's ecstatic relationship to being should not be finally identified with such dread. This becomes absolute only when being is wilfully conceived as ultimately empty necessity and nihilistically inimical to finite beings.¹⁴

In contrast, an authentic metaphysical sense of wonder concerns an encounter with being's actuality that cannot be reduced to a necessary order, the totality of all beings or sheer nothingness. This wonder is not principally about an encounter with the unexpected within the realm of existing

Difference, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 42-75. Cf., *TL2*, 134-135n.10; D.C. Schindler, "Hans Urs von Balthasar, Metaphysics, and the Problem of Onto-Theology," *Analecta Hermeneutica*, 1, (2009): 109-113.

⁹ *GL5*, 656.

¹⁰ *GL5*, 614-615. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kulback (New Haven: College and University Press, 1958), para. 46-48.

¹¹ *GL5*, 613.

¹² *GL5*, 613-614.

¹³ *GL5*, 614.

¹⁴ *GL1*, 158-159.

beings. As Schindler clarifies, the latter merely involves an ontic wonder; ‘the arrival of an unanticipated person or thing within the horizon of a person’s particular field of attention or concern. Metaphysical wonder, however, is possible only where the horizon of *being* itself is not closed but is constituted so as to include a “more”: in other words, to include a difference.’¹⁵ Metaphysical wonder thus arises from an irreducible difference inherent to being’s self-exceeding character. Within this framework, difference is affirmed as wholly positive. More concretely, wonder is not correlated simply to being, which risks abstraction or emptiness, but also to beings. Ontic differences between beings mediate ontological differences inherent to being, and vice versa. Both combine to cause metaphysical wonder. As we shall see, Balthasar is concerned not simply with difference between beings, considered in the abstract. He focuses on a special category of ontic differences: those which obtain between humans and what they disclose about being. This accounts for why Balthasar begins his consideration of the fourfold difference with a person’s experience of their existence. He links wonder at being to the origin of interpersonal subjectivity itself.

2. Fourfold Difference as the Primal *Gestalt* of Created Being

In his account of being’s fourfold difference, Balthasar progressively unfolds different relationships that comprise a single complex concrete whole. Together they comprise the phenomenon of being’s primal *Gestalt* which is the source of being’s authentic beauty that causes wonder.¹⁶ In what follows, I consider each of the differences of the fourfold in turn and then reflect on its implications for the relationship between being and humans.

2.1. First difference: mother and child

The first difference rests on the first self-consciousness encounter of a child with its mother wherein the child awakens as embodied spirit open to being. This is, for Balthasar, the actual beginning of the metaphysical wonder for each person. It is ‘arguably the most fundamental insight in Balthasar’s philosophy, an insight that affects everything else.’¹⁷ Indeed, this insistence on the historical provenance of the beginning of a person’s self-consciousness is, for Schindler, ‘one of Balthasar’s most fundamental contributions in philosophy.... [W]e can hardly avoid speaking of a “paradigm shift”’¹⁸

¹⁵ *DST*, 32.

¹⁶ *GL5*, 615

¹⁷ *DST*, 37.

¹⁸ *DST*, 99. Cf., Kerr, “Balthasar and metaphysics,” 237, offers a more measured assessment: ‘Balthasar’s signalling of the importance of the mother-child relationship is certainly illuminating and deserves further reflection....’

The first difference focuses on the interpersonal difference and unity between a child and its mother. Though the child-mother relationship is an ontic, anthropological and biological difference, Balthasar's chief concern is its metaphysical significance. Indeed, it contains incipiently each of the differences comprising being's fourfold difference. Here Balthasar compares the metaphysical question – 'Why anything?' – to a person's self-questioning about their existence in the world – 'Why do I exist?' These converge on how a person is conceived, born and awoken as embodied spirit such that any person's existence is astonishing beyond measure and cannot be exhaustively explained by causes within the world. Balthasar comments how little 'the enigma of reproduction – not only of organic natural creatures but above all of man, who is Spirit – has concerned philosophers.'¹⁹ Expanding he says,

[f]rom the infinite prodigality of an act of generation – prodigality in the male as well as the female organism resulting in a 'chance hit' – a 'new' being is created which, reflecting upon its personal ego, cannot interpret itself in any way as a product of chance; for it possesses in fact the capacity to view the world as a whole, indeed Being as a whole, from its unrepeatable perspective and thus to effect a unification of what it sees....²⁰

The birth of a new self-reflective spirit who can reflect meaningfully on existence and the world as a whole is irreducible to mere chance. Neither is it a matter of sheer necessity for not only does the world continue to exist whether or not a person exists, but no person is simply reducible to their source. They stand apart as something unique and gratuitous.²¹ This is expressed in each person's spiritual capacity to question their contingent existence against the seeming necessity of the world's being and its order. While such self-reflection is characteristic of an adult self-consciousness, Balthasar asks how this capacity for self-conscious encounter with being arises.

Balthasar identifies this beginning with an event of encounter that takes place between a child and mother. This is the primary difference of the fourfold difference because here each person receives their capacity for metaphysical reality. Balthasar states,

[the child's] 'I' awakens in the experience of a 'Thou': in its mother's smile through which it learns that it is contained, affirmed and loved in a relationship which is incomprehensively encompassing, already actual, sheltering and nourishing. The body which it snuggles into, ...is a kiss of love in which it can take shelter because it has been sheltered there *a priori*. The

¹⁹ *GL5*, 614.

²⁰ *GL5*, 614.

²¹ *GL5*, 615.

awakening of its consciousness is a late occurrence, in comparison with this basic mystery of unfathomable depth. It finally sees only what always has been, and can therefore only confirm it. A light which has been perpetually asleep awakens at some point into an alert and self-knowing light. But it awakens at the love of the Thou, as it has always slept in the womb and on the bosom of the Thou. 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. Therefore it is right that the child should glimpse the Absolute, 'God'..., first in its mother, its parents, and that only in a second and third stage does it have to learn to distinguish the love of God from the love which it has experienced in this way.²²

This passage incorporates several important aspects of Balthasar's metaphysical thought. I summarise them here and treat them more fully in subsequent chapters. First, this event marks the historical genesis of a child's self-consciousness. This is 'both historical *and* a genuine beginning, namely, the fundamental experience of the child. As historical, it is relative, but as fundamental and...paradigmatic, it is...in a certain sense absolute.'²³ Though the child's self-consciousness needs to develop, this encounter is *sui generis* as the child's awakens for the first time as a self-conscious embodied spirit open to being as a whole. This is an awakening of a pre-existent but dormant light: the intellectual light latent within the child's nature as spirit; and, the light of being in which the human spirit participates.

Secondly, this awakening depends on the encounter with the prior reality of another existing person and, by extension, the prior actuality of other beings, being itself, God, and spiritual nature's intrinsic openness to these. Ontologically speaking, therefore, the already actual has priority *vis-à-vis* the child's new being and self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is constituted and shaped by an encounter with a Thou. This establishes, moreover, from the outset, the thoroughly dialogical and reciprocal nature of human self-consciousness. It represents an alternative account of self-consciousness to the fully formed standalone self-consciousness assumed by modern philosophy.

Thirdly, the encounter is a concrete one. The child awakens through its sense-based encounter with the *Gestalt* of the mother's love wherein it encounters the mother herself. Most comprehensively, what appears is the ever-greater mystery of the mother's essential mystery as embodied spirit and her openness to being, other beings, and God. This is, therefore, an encounter with being's beauty

²² *GL5*, 616.

²³ *DST*, 38.

as disclosed in the concrete gift of personal love – an epiphany to which the child has no choice but to assent where this underpins every subsequent self-conscious act.

These three aspects emphasise how, in the encounter with its mother, the child attains the self-awareness of its difference from her only in relationship to her. This denotes a fourth element. The child's awakening occurs within an *a priori* relationship of love which Balthasar notes is 'a basic mystery of unfathomable depth.' Their relationship is already actual and incomprehensively encompassing. It is characterised by both a unity-in-difference, namely, the pre-existent relationship of love between them, and a difference-in-unity which affirms their irreducibly distinct identities. Into this pre-existing relationship of love the child awakens to self-consciousness. Balthasar refers to this as the 'experience of being granted entrance.' He also speaks of it as 'being admitted', 'being permitted to be', or a 'letting be.'²⁴ Balthasar adds,

there can be nothing more beyond the love which wakens me and shelters me, and which greets me in the smiling face of my mother. Many things can interfere: incomprehensible departure, not being understood, pain, death. But all that is only an interpolation. Perhaps it will appear infinite, perhaps interrupted by lightning recollections of the origin: but I have been given a measure for all that is called distance and distinction. However excluded I may be, I remain primarily someone who has been permitted entry.²⁵

This underpins the fundamentally affirmative and positive nature of the encounter as foundational for human self-consciousness *per se*, wherein difference is affirmed. The child's difference from its mother is entirely positive and not a function of loss. The paradigmatic nature of this encounter for each person stretches beyond the immediate relationship between mother and child to reality itself. This reflects an all-pervasive sense of being-permitted-to-be. Balthasar associates this with a child's capacity for play which he gives a metaphysical gloss.

[The child] 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 a [*sic*] myriad

²⁴ *GL5*, 617, 633, 627.

²⁵ *GL5*, 635.

passers-by – which could add anything to the encounter with the first-comprehended smile of the mother....²⁶

This affirms how the overriding positive nature of the unity-in-difference that characterises the encounter between mother and child has its roots in ontological reality. It is the ‘most primitive experience of Being.’²⁷ It is a primordial experience characterised by ‘primal and overpowering wonder.’²⁸ Hence, starting with the child-mother relationship in a metaphysical account of the character of finite being is no arbitrary choice. It is the condition of possibility and measure for every interaction with being. This, in turn, has implications for how a person relates to contradiction, negativity, loss, suffering and evil. How these are met will vary according to whether they are seen against the *a priori* positive structure of self-consciousness as a matter of ontological reality. As we will see, Balthasar puts this primordial and paradigmatic sense of being-permitted-to-be, with its positive sense of unity-in-difference, to ontological and theological use when he explores the second, third and fourth differences of the fourfold difference. These are ‘only the ever greater extension of the same thing which is already present in the first act of self-consciousness of the awakening child. This first act, journey towards transcendence, immediately touches the final end....’²⁹ What is crucial to recognise at this point is how the positive nature of the interpersonal difference between mother and child opens into the properly metaphysical dimension since it concerns the relationship between finite spirit and finite being for each person. This concretely and anthropologically glosses how metaphysics, even a rejection of metaphysics, presupposes a relationship between spirit and being.³⁰ As Balthasar expands:

there occurs an opening within me as Spirit to the light-space of Being, which is in no way directed to the Being of the world as a whole: if in the first aspect my spirit ‘nihilates’ with respect to the Being of the world into which I find myself to be thrown and constrained, then in the second aspect the Being of the world ‘nihilates’ within the opening of my spirit, which can attribute to the Being of the world no necessity within itself which would excite our wonder at its existence: both are related to each other, but they do not coincide.³¹

This language needs unpacking. The existence of a self-conscious person is not simply accidental or something which can be regulated. But neither can the individual self-conscious person be identical

²⁶ GL5, 617.

²⁷ GL5, 618.

²⁸ GL5, 619.

²⁹ GL5, 635.

³⁰ Cf., Long, *Speaking of God*, 9.

³¹ GL5, 618.

to the actuality of being nor the necessity of the world. The child's finite spirit transcends the being of the world because it can spiritually reflect the whole in itself; but this same being transcends finite spirit from within spirit as its cause and so has ontological priority. There is, therefore, an asymmetrical relationship of mutual transcending where 'Being transcends the spirit *within* the spirit's transcending of Being.'³² It is a mutual transcending where neither spirit nor being are reduced to each other, something which Balthasar seeks to communicate with the word 'nihilates.'³³

By linking this ontological asymmetrical reciprocity between spirit and being to the interpersonal asymmetrical reciprocity between mother and child, Balthasar underlines how the former (spirit-being) is mediated by the latter (mother-child) which opens to the former. Hence, the mother-child encounter needs to be understood not only on a phenomenological level whereby consciousness is always related to the object of consciousness which appears to it, but also on a metaphysical level where what appears to and constitutes self-consciousness is being as a whole in another particular being. Priority is given to the metaphysical because it is the concrete encounter with being that constitutes the relationship between consciousness and being from the first.

Balthasar goes on to explore this in the subsequent differences of the fourfold difference, employing Thomist thought particularly to offer an account of being's structure. As Schindler notes, Balthasar's beginning, however, can be distinguished from more abstract Thomist approaches which presume a fully formed human self-consciousness. Balthasar stresses how openness to being itself, which underpins any philosophy concerned with metaphysics, 'does *not* occur in the first place through the process of abstraction, nor even through the separation of Being from all limiting differences (*separatio*)...but rather initially in the inexhaustible fullness of the child's joyful awakening in love.'³⁴ The upshot is that the beginning of metaphysics is inherently interpersonal whereby each person's self-conscious relation to being is constituted dramatically in the encounter of a child with the love of its mother. This is crucial to recall as Balthasar goes onto consider being's structure, so revealed. If the intrinsic relationship of the first difference to the other three is lost Balthasar's understanding of the primal *Gestalt* of created being risks ossifying.³⁵

³² *DST*, 39n.30.

³³ Balthasar employs Heidegger's term *nichten* (to nihilate). As Schindler explains: 'The verb *nichten*...helps us to see that the twofold transcendence is *at the same time* and *in the same respect* the openness of the one to the other. The word *nothingness* understood verbally is...the act of *opening*, and it is thus both *ek-stasis*...and receptivity.' *DST*, 38-39.

³⁴ *DST*, 40.

³⁵ This is the criticism of, for example, Ide, *Être et mystère*, 178. Cf., Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165-195. Quash judges that Balthasar erects an 'unaccountable scaffolding' of being. Balthasar 'introduces a (secretly *a priori*) patterning' between God and

2.2. Second difference: the difference of Being from beings

Having considered the interpersonal beginning to metaphysics, Balthasar turns to the nature of being so disclosed. Each person's awakening to self-consciousness is accompanied by a dawning realisation that they are one among all other beings that exist. Self-consciousness opens onto the vista of being's transcendence. Here 'all existents partake in Being, yet...never exhaust it nor even, as it were, "broach" it.'³⁶ Being cannot be equated with any particular being or the sum total of beings. Even if we imagine this totality 'to be quantitatively and qualitatively as extended and as perfect' as possible it still does not equate with the primal wonder of the encounter with being in the first place.³⁷ This heralds the 'unsurpassable abundance of Being'.³⁸

Here Balthasar adopts Aquinas' sense of being's actuality as *esse*: the perfect, complete and simple act, 'the actuality of actuality,' which brings about the existence of individual beings (*ens*).³⁹ Hence, for Balthasar and Aquinas alike, *esse* comes first in the order of finite reality. *Esse* is most universal and perfect as the source of all other perfections. *Esse* transcends not only individual beings but the realm of essential categories altogether. To refer to *esse* as act relies on the Aristotelean distinction between act (*energeia*) and potency (*dunamis*), where something that is in potency can only be moved to act through something already in act. Whereas for Aristotle substantial form or essence is the highest actuality, Aquinas holds that essence is in potency as to the act of being (*esse*).⁴⁰ Hence, *esse* is that pure act which actualises the essence of each individual being.

To further explicate this, Balthasar, like Aquinas, employs the Platonic notion of participation.⁴¹ Thus, any finite essence can be said to participate in *esse*, where *esse* does not belong to anything that

creation 'which is itself, in the end, little more than a static "form" (*Gestalt*), and not dramatic at all....' Ibid., 167. I argue this does not do justice to the dramatic core of Balthasar's notion of analogy and *Gestalt*. For a critique of Quash's interpretation, based on an essay treating the same themes, see *DST*, 21-24. Cf., Ben Quash, "Drama and the Ends of Modernity," in Lucy Gardner et al., *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, 139-171.

³⁶ *GL5*, 618.

³⁷ *GL5*, 618.

³⁸ *GL5*, 618.

³⁹ *GL5*, 624. Cf., *ST*, 1a.13.5; 1a.4.3. Regarding the rediscovery of the importance of *esse* to Aquinas' thought, see, Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952); Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1939); Joseph de Finance, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1965); Gustav Siewerth, *Der Thomismus als Identitätssystem* (Frankfurt: Gerhard Schulte-Bulmke, 1939); Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, trans. D.C. Schindler (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018). For a detailed engagement with Aquinas metaphysical thought, see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 238-294.

⁴⁰ *ST*, 1a.3.4.

⁴¹ Cf., *ST*, 1a.3.4; 1a.44.1. For a discussion of 'participation' in Aquinas, see Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*; L.B. Geiger, *La Participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Librairie

exists by virtue of its essence. No *ens* is the source of its *esse*. *What* it is does not entail *that* it is. The notion of participation also explicates how *esse* cannot be identified with the totality of existing beings. Rather, all individual beings participate in *esse* which nevertheless transcends every being which participates in it. Again Balthasar refers to this as *esse's* act of self-transcending or 'nihilating': 'Being [*esse*], in which a world totality participates, possesses its own mode of "nihilating", that is an indissoluble identity with respect to every participation within it....'⁴² The superabundant actuality of *esse* in which all beings participate accords with the primitive experience of wonder at there being anything at all. *Esse* has a mode of transcendence which goes beyond the beauty of the totality of everything that exists. This is the glorious beauty of *esse* or *actus essendi* which radiates in the latter. As Balthasar notes, Aquinas 'attributes to the *actus essendi* its own *bonum-pulchrum* in which the individual *essentiae* and the world which is constituted by them only participate.'⁴³

This second difference emphasises how the interpersonal encounter of the first, and the awakening to self-consciousness it effects, are mediated by the prior actuality of *esse* which is the immediate source of the existence of the child, the mother, their relationship and, by extension, all other beings that exist. There can be no interpersonal encounter without *esse*. Balthasar stresses, however, that this superabundance of *esse* is not separate from the essences of the beings that participate in *esse*, and, with reference to humans, without the concrete interpersonal encounter between mother and child. To ignore this risks an abstract notion of *esse* and a diminution of each being's essential reality. Accordingly, Balthasar affirms the converse relationship, namely, the difference of beings from *esse* as the third difference in his metaphysical scheme.

Before considering this, however, Balthasar notes how this movement to the third difference is not wilful but occurs as a dramatic unfolding of the encounter with being in the awakened self-consciousness of the person in their spirit's intrinsic relation to being. As with the child's sense-based encounter with the *Gestalt* of its mother's smile, this self-conscious encounter occurs simultaneously on the level of the spirit's relation to the whole of being, and the sensory encounter with other *entia* that participate in *esse*. As Balthasar says,

if my spirit is conformed to this act of Being in which it participates and also performs the act of thinking (*intellectus agens*) in the light of this superessential...act of Being in order to grasp what is essential, then it understands at the same time that it is not the act of Being

Philosophique J. Vrin, 1952); Rudi Te Velde, *Participation And Substantiality In Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); and, Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 94-131.

⁴² *GL5*, 618.

⁴³ *GL5*, 619.

which has the responsibility of bringing essences into existence from itself, just as it is not my *intellectus agens* (without the *conversio ad phantasma*) which constructs the real world; not only 'concepts without intuition are empty,' but the 'idea' or the 'light' or the 'abundance' of Being remain so too.⁴⁴

Here the dual aspect of human self-consciousness that encompasses the intellect and the return to the imagination's sensible images (*phantasma*) corresponds to being's dual structure wherein *esse* depends on essences in their difference from and dependence on *esse*. From this perspective, wonder relates not just to *esse* but also the beings that participate in *esse*. In this dual wonder at beings and *esse* dawns the realisation that *esse* cannot be attained apart from concrete beings.⁴⁵

2.3. Third difference: the difference of beings from Being

The third difference reflects how the act of being (*esse* or *actus essendi*), in its superabundant actuality, depends on *entia* for its concrete actuality. This extends, moreover, to a dependence on the actions and interrelations that arise from each being's essential nature which participates in *esse*.

This third difference is not tautologous to the second between beings and Being (*esse*).⁴⁶ Rather, it highlights the co-dependency and asymmetry of *esse* and beings (*ens*). Balthasar thus distinguishes Aquinas' metaphysics from that of, particularly, Heidegger and Hegel, who affirm being's dependence on beings yet reduce one to the other. In the early Heidegger, beings are sacrificed to being's absolute nothingness; in the late Heidegger, being's nothingness depends on beings to the extent that it becomes essentialised.⁴⁷ For Hegel, being is at first an empty concept that depends on beings to come to full realisation, yet dialectically subsumes them into spiritual being as a whole, understood in abstract, essentialist albeit dynamic terms.⁴⁸ For Balthasar, it is critical to recognise that for Aquinas *esse* cannot be reduced to but transcends all individual beings as the

⁴⁴ *GL5*, 619.

⁴⁵ *GL5*, 619.

⁴⁶ Cf., Kerr, "Balthasar and metaphysics," 237, 'Whether the twofold difference between Being and beings/beings and Being achieves very much, or is even intelligible, would require more discussion....' In what follows, I show how Balthasar develops the notion of *esse* as non-subsistent and a more paradoxical notion of the ontological difference and the relationship between Being and beings than Kerr acknowledges.

⁴⁷ *GL5*, 448-449. For the early view, see, e.g. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). For later perspective, see, e.g., Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*.

⁴⁸ *GL5*, 572-590. See Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45-125.

superabundant source of their existence. Equally, individual beings in their essential nature cannot be reduced to but transcend *esse* as allowing *esse* to be actualised in actual beings.

Balthasar reiterates how, in contrast to the later Heidegger, *esse* cannot have responsibility for essences because it depends on them to come to subsistence as a particular being. Moreover,

[t]he *indifferentia* of the abundance which is characteristic of the Being of the existent fundamentally contradicts any form of planning, located within Being, in order to actualise itself in substance through a specific ascending sequence of stages of essential forms, which contain it first as ‘vessels’ and then (as Heidegger says) finally shepherd it. For the ‘plans’ lie in the entity, not in Being, however true it may be that there are no entities which do not participate in Being.⁴⁹

The superabundant fullness of *esse* coupled with its simultaneous dependence on essences means *esse* cannot be responsible for essence *qua* essence; nor, the plans or *telo*i which inhere the individual essence of each being; nor, the wider order which each being and its intrinsic *telos* is a part. This raises several important aspects of Balthasar’s understanding of the real distinction/ontological difference.

First, there is the central notion of the non-subsistence of *esse* which accounts for its dependence on essences.⁵⁰ Balthasar treats a statement by Aquinas as axiomatic: ‘Being [*esse*] denotes something complete and simple, yet non-subsistent.’⁵¹ In *GL4*, referring to Aquinas, Balthasar elaborates:

because *esse* does not subsist, it cannot even be said to release natures from itself as its “possibilities”; it is only in them that it comes to “standing” and subsistence.... Thus *esse*...is at once both total fullness and total nothingness: fullness, because it is the most noble, the first and most proper effect of God, because ‘through being [*esse*] God causes all things’ and ‘being [*esse*] is prior and more interior than all other effects’. But being [*esse*] is also nothingness since it does not exist as such, for ‘just as one cannot say that running runs’, but rather that ‘the runner runs’, so ‘one cannot say that existence exists’.⁵²

This passage shows how the non-subsistence of *esse* requires a fourth difference between God and creation where God is the cause of finite *esse*. We will consider this shortly. For present purposes,

⁴⁹ *GL5*, 619-620.

⁵⁰ On the non-subsistence of *esse* in Aquinas see, Gustav Siewerth, *Philosophizing with Gustav Siewerth – Das Sein als Gleichnis Gottes: Being as Likeness of God*, trans. Andrzej Wiercinski (Konstanz: Gustav Siewerth Gesellschaft, 2005); Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 28-30; cf., *TL2*, 183.

⁵¹ *De Potentia*, 1.1.

⁵² *GL4*, 401-404.

Balthasar interprets Aquinas as not only affirming the transcendent fullness of *esse* as the source of everything that exists (second difference), but also its nothingness by virtue of *esse*'s dependency on essence (third difference).

Secondly, *esse*'s non-subsistence underpins the irreducible ontological dignity of the essences of beings. Essences are required by *esse* for *esse* to come into subsistence in actual beings and the distinctive activities which flow from their essential natures. Hence, while essences do not exist prior to or without *esse*, there is nonetheless a sense in which they, or rather the whole being to which they belong, are paradoxically prior to *esse* as the latter only attains subsistence in beings according to their essential natures. I explore this more fully in the fourth difference.

Thirdly, given the presupposition of *esse*'s non-subsistence and dependence on essence, and essence's concomitant dependence on *esse*, and their mutual irreducibility, a preliminary case can be made for the relationship between *esse* and *entia* being one of mutual dependence. Balthasar refers to this as a polar relationship. In *TL1*, he elaborates

[n]ot only does the 'real distinction' between essence and *esse*-existence...pervade every last fibre of all finite being, but...each pole can be accounted for only and strictly in terms of the other. The existence of such polarities gives finite being the consistency, vitality, and dignity that elevate it beyond mere facticity and make it the object of an unquenchable interest, indeed, of a reverent, astonished wonderment. For the more deeply the knower delves into these structures, the more they unveil themselves to him and, at the same time, withdraw behind the veil of their mystery.⁵³

This polar relationship refers to a reciprocity between *esse* and essence that coheres in the dynamic reality of an actually existing entity or *ens*. Balthasar calls this a 'double dependence,' a 'mutual conditionedness,' and a 'conditioned, mutually dependent freedom.'⁵⁴ The notion of a polar relationship when applied to created being, therefore, refers to a relationship of irreducible yet correlated terms. This is distinguished from an extrinsic dualism where terms are not mutually dependent on each other. It is, moreover, distinct but inseparable from the theological polarity that constitutes finite being, namely, between God and creation (fourth difference). The notion of polarity is a crucial concept for Balthasar, one he borrows from Przywara.⁵⁵ He applies it not only to the relationship between existence/*esse* and essence, or God and creation, but also to other

⁵³ *TL1*, 9.

⁵⁴ *GL5*, 635.

⁵⁵ For the notion of 'polarity,' Cf., *TL1*, 9, 105-106; *E*, 55; *GL1*, 441-462. On Przywara, see Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 59.

metaphysical terms (for example, act and potency, essence and appearance, subject and object) and human nature, such as the polarities between the soul and body, male and female, and the individual and the community.⁵⁶ The nature of the polarity differs in each instance, however, and so cannot be univocally applied, but must be analogically related to the basic polarities that constitute finite being.

Regarding created being, the polar relationship between *esse* and essence is not simply reciprocal but asymmetrical where each pole offers to the other that which constitutes them in themselves.⁵⁷ Such asymmetry concerns the difference in how *esse* and essence causally relate to each other. Each term is a cause and effect of the other, but in different ways, and as part of a single unified whole or *Gestalt*.⁵⁸ Thus, while *esse* has absolute ontological priority insofar as it accounts for the existence of anything, essence and action/operation have relative priority vis-à-vis *esse* for only in them does *esse* come to expression as an actual *ens*. This mutual priority ensures their abiding distinctiveness. Put differently, this asymmetrical reciprocity denotes the real nature of the relationship between *esse* and essence, as opposed to a merely conceptual relation.

It is important to clarify that, for Balthasar, the notions of essence and existence are themselves complex. Balthasar's interpretation of the real distinction thus affirms an intersection between two different polarities, namely, between an essential and an existential polarity where each is characterised by a tension and movement between immanence and transcendence.⁵⁹ Any *ens* is a concrete whole comprised of the intersection between these two polarities. Thus, existence refers, immanently, to the particularity and irreplaceable uniqueness of a being in its historical existence (*existentia*). In transcendent terms, *esse* is the inexhaustible source of all being which brings and sustains all things in existence. This transcendent-immanent dynamic can be summarised as 'existence-in-beyond-essence.'⁶⁰

Similarly, essence refers, immanently, to the intelligible form, nature, interiority, and unity instantiated in particular beings (echoing the Aristotelian *morphe*). This sense of essence incorporates, moreover, a being's intrinsic final end or telos (*entelecheia*) whereby it fulfils its nature

⁵⁶ *TD2*, 335-393

⁵⁷ For a discussion of 'asymmetrical reciprocity' in Balthasar, see *DST*, 126.

⁵⁸ Cf., David L. Schindler, "Agere Sequitur Esse: What Does It Mean? A Reply To Father Austriaco," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32, (2005): 809-810. Schindler charts this asymmetry vis-à-vis matter and form. Cf., Thomas Aquinas, *Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*, trans. Joseph Bobik (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1965), para 16-18.

⁵⁹ For what follows, see *TL1*, 35-71; 131-205; and *E*, 43-57. Cf. *DST*, 28-95; and Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 19-90.

⁶⁰ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 478. Cf., *DST*, 84-88.

through its characteristic actions. Both the internal telos of each entity and the interactions between beings already suggests an immanent transcendence within material reality. Conversely, essence can be understood, in transcendent terms, to refer to the universal truth of the nature (echoing the Platonic *eidos*) that any being of a certain kind shares with all other beings of the same kind without being fully exhausted by them. This includes, moreover, any such nature's place within the intelligible whole that makes up the order and telos of all that exists. This dynamic within the essential polarity can be encapsulated as 'essence-in-beyond-existence.'⁶¹ For Balthasar, the intersection of these polarities constitutes the concrete 'constellation' or *Gestalt* of any being.⁶² This holds true, however, only if these polarities are not absolutized, but seen to open beyond themselves to God (fourth difference).

Fourthly, and finally, at this stage Balthasar is presenting the non-subsistence of *esse* as a fundamental premise for understanding the relationship between *esse* and essence/*ens*. His concern is to account for their interdependence without referring immediately to a divine source in a way that elides the difference between God and creation. This reflects how the *esse-ens* relationship is not self-evident but can be interpreted differently. Balthasar here proceeds negatively by critiquing different interpretations of the real distinction as, either, sheer necessity (where essences are simply the self-explication of an ultimately essentialised *esse* as per Hegel or alternatively *esse* is identified with a nothingness beyond essences to which the latter are reduced as per early Heidegger); or, sheer freedom of choice (where *esse*, as it were, decides to express itself in essences, and so adopts characteristics of willed choice which, however, does not belong to *esse qua esse*, but is rather indicative of an actual being with a spiritual nature which *esse* cannot be as per late Heidegger). The problem is that, via a hidden choice, these views threaten to reduce being to the order of necessity and/or nothingness thereby undermining the wonder at there being anything at all and the diversity of essential forms. As Balthasar says, here the glory or beauty of being is lost. Either it is reduced to 'the beauty of the order that prevails within the world (the totality of which then becomes 'explicated' Being),' or, 'it is submerged in the necessity of an ineluctable self-explication of Being, governed by no ultimate form of freedom, in order simply to be itself.'⁶³ In either case, 'the primal phenomenon is not treated appropriately, and not even the most soaring metaphysical towers can conceal this....'⁶⁴

⁶¹ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 124; 160-191. Cf., *DST*, 82-84.

⁶² *TL1*, 193.

⁶³ *GL5*, 621-622.

⁶⁴ *GL5*, 622.

By contrast, Balthasar argues that being's primal phenomenon encompasses both the manifestation of the essence of things in their outward appearances and actions, and how this manifestation is dependent on and yet distinct from *esse*. *Esse* makes this manifestation possible by bringing all that exists into being as their transcendent source, even as *esse* depends on the dynamic expression of essences for subsistence. Thus,

the 'ground' of a living entity – be it a plant, animal, or person – is always 'more' than what is projected on to the phenomenal surface, and this mysterious More can also be read in a mysterious manner from that surface, most supremely in the free spiritual being which, in expressing itself, retains the sovereign capacity (mendaciously) to conceal itself all the while. Any yet this is not at all sufficient to characterise the incomprehensible 'freedom' of Being itself, which plays indifferently over all things and is bound to nothing, and on the grounds of which the elevated, sublime (transcendental) radiance of glory is justified, that radiance which streams intangibly through everything which is.⁶⁵

Hence, Balthasar's negative critique has the positive aim of offering a counterview of the relationship between *esse* and essence as characterised by a sense of freedom contemporaneous with mutual interdependence. Echoing the loving relationship between mother and child, but now on a fully ontological platform, this mutual freedom-in-dependency between *esse* and essence entails a reciprocal 'letting be'. Here 'just as being does not mould everything which is to itself, but lets it be, in the same way all that is must correspondingly allow being to dwell in its imperturbability, in order that its light should rise over all.'⁶⁶ Hence, finite *esse*, as non-subsistent, 'lets' all things be in their participation in its pure actuality and fullness through their distinctive essences; similarly, each essence exhibits a different 'letting be' regarding *esse* where, though the latter achieves subsistence in each being, *esse* is not reduced to beings but abides in its freedom beyond all *entia*. The unity of finite being, therefore, entails a double 'letting be' between *esse* and essence within the overarching context of their relationship in actual beings. Neither *esse* nor essence can account for each other or their mutual dependency whereby finite being is utterly contingent and in no way absolute.

Balthasar stresses, however, how this mutual letting be must itself interpreted and affirmed in a decisive choice: either nihilistically where *esse*'s letting be is a sheer nothingness devoid of fullness whereby it collapses back into the totality of the world understood as endless becoming; or, as

⁶⁵ *GL5*, 622.

⁶⁶ *GL5*, 622.

pointing beyond *esse* and essence to a transcendent single source – which opens the third difference to the fourth difference between God and creation. Here ‘God is the sole sufficient ground for both Being and the existent in its possession of form [*Gestalt*].’⁶⁷ This means that the *ens* of which both *esse* and essence are constituent metaphysical parts is a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, since neither can account for the unity of the whole. Yet this whole beyond them is only manifested in their dynamic unity-in-difference. As Healy notes, the “more” of which Balthasar speaks is an inner fruitfulness resident within the ontological difference as a whole. Inasmuch as this “more” is richer even than the difference itself, our wonder is directed beyond the reality of the world.’⁶⁸

2.4. Fourth difference – God and creation

Given the above, the polarity between *esse* and essence is not absolute and self-grounding. Rather, its contingent, mutually-conditioned dynamic opens to a source beyond itself which cannot be deduced by necessity but only wondered at in the reality of anything existing at all. This heralds the fourth difference that characterises finite being, namely, between God and creation.

It is worth noting that when Balthasar locates the source of *esse* and *ens* in God, he is not positing a *deus ex machina*. He hints at this risk whenever the God-creation relationship is based on necessity not freedom: ‘gingerly, almost against our will, we must posit the fourth opening of distinction: beyond the still conditioned, mutually dependent freedom of the existent with regard to Being and the freedom of Being to shine unconstrainedly as a light within the existent’⁶⁹ Like Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*, Balthasar delineates how God must be understood ontologically as the cause of finite being given its contingency and pattern of self-transcending mutual dependency.⁷⁰ What, therefore, must God be like if God is the source of *esse* and each being’s essential reality? And, how does this impact the nature of finite being?

2.4.1. God as self-subsisting *esse*

To answer the first of these questions, if God is understood as cause, this is meant *sui generis*. This is because God is cause of both finite *esse* in its freedom, actuality, fullness and non-subsistence; and, the inexhaustible dignity, intelligible coherence, and relative necessity of beings with their essential

⁶⁷ *GL5*, 624.

⁶⁸ Healy, *Eschatology*, 68.

⁶⁹ *GL5*, 636.

⁷⁰ Cf., Te Velde, *God*, 91-92n.24, 74-75, 177.

natures, actions and mode of causality, all of which are contingent as to their existence. Consequently,

the grounding in God of this Being which does not depend upon any necessity, points to an *ultimate freedom* which neither Being (as non-subsistent) could have, nor the existent entity (since it always finds itself already constituted in its own essentiality). And so on the one hand, the freedom of non-subsisting Being can be secured in its 'glory' in the face of all that exists only if its grounded in a subsisting freedom of absolute Being, which is God, and so, on the other hand, the dignity of an essential form evades being threatened by the encompassing act of Being and thus being swallowed up and devoured as an invalid 'stage of Being' only if its valid contour can be referred back to a sovereign and absolute imagination or power of creation.⁷¹

In comparing finite being and God's infinite being, Balthasar articulates a central aspect of the traditional Catholic notion of the analogy of being. He is employing an analogical and Neo-platonic perspective which in Thomist terms is tantamount to an analogy of attribution.⁷² This can be understood in a variety of ways.⁷³ Balthasar here implicitly proposes a so-called analogy of intrinsic attribution. This relates to perfections in creatures, such as being or goodness. While such perfections refer primarily to God, nevertheless God causes these perfections to exist in creatures and so they refer to something intrinsic in creatures, albeit derived, that are attributed to the creature because it has its source in God.⁷⁴ These perfections are, moreover, pre-eminent in God because, as the absolutely free cause of created being, God is beyond the complexity, dependency and contingency that characterises finite being. Balthasar thus analogically extrapolates from the transcendent orientation of the unity-in-difference of finite *esse* and finite essence in beings towards their divine ground wherein the freedom and actuality of *esse* and the intelligibility and dignity of essence coincide in a pre-eminent and wholly positive way.⁷⁵ There is here an immanent upward and self-transcending orientation to this aspect of the analogy. Given there can be no necessary link

⁷¹ *GL5*, 625.

⁷² Cf., *TD3*, 221n52.

⁷³ The analogy of attribution (also known as analogy *pros hen*, or, *ad aliquid unum*, that is, an order towards one) is where two (or many) things are related to a third term (or one thing is related another). The example used by Aristotle and Aquinas is that of health, which is used differently, but not unrelatedly, when used of man, urine and medicine. The latter two are healthy in an analogous sense as a sign and cause of health in man. Cf., *ST*, 1a.13.5. This is extrinsic attribution insofar as urine and medicine are not in themselves healthy. There is scholarly debate as to whether, with suitable qualification, an analogy of attribution safeguards the dissimilarity between God and creation. See Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 39n.111 and 73n.202.

⁷⁴ Cf., *De Veritate*, 21.4.

⁷⁵ Cf., *De Potentia*, 7.5 'The idea of negation is always based on an affirmation....'

between how these occur in finite being and God's infinite being, however, this means excluding the elements of *esse* and essence that characterise their contingent finitude, namely, non-subsistence regarding *esse* and existence regarding essence.⁷⁶

Accordingly, for Balthasar, God, ontologically-speaking, is the preeminent and infinite instance of *esse* and essence in their unity – a pure actuality which is not dependent on anything to exist or subsist.⁷⁷ God is the absolute freedom of self-subsisting *esse* – what Aquinas refers to as *esse ipsum per se subsistens* – which is always fully actualised in its essence, and the free and responsible creative source of all essences.⁷⁸ Balthasar here indicates the ontological minimum regarding God being's given that finite being cannot be accounted for by necessity or random chance if the freedom of finite *esse* and *entia* is to be affirmed. God is, therefore, 'an unconditioned freedom...an *actus purus*, which is posited in the first instance only in order to preserve the light of openness between Being and the existent as a free and unconstrained light so that the individual entity is not submerged within the exigencies of a process of explication and Being does not lose its freedom in the same "Odyssey" of its cosmic evolution towards itself.'⁷⁹

2.4.2. *The ontological difference as the site of God's freedom*

Understanding what the divine source of finite being must be like, namely, characterised by an infinite freedom in no way dependent on finite being, impacts how the dynamic and self-transcending relationship between finite *esse* and finite beings is understood and enacted. Rather than the dynamic oscillation of their polar relationship being reduced to nothingness or made into an absolute mathematical necessity, it is the site of the manifestation of the absolute freedom and creative power of divine being. Here 'each "pole", has to seek and find its "salvation" in the other pole: Being arrives at itself as subsistent only within the entity and the entity arrives at its actuality (and thus at the possibility of its self-generation and *perfectio*) only within its participation in Being.'⁸⁰ In other words, the divine freedom manifests itself within finite being in its very difference from God and, therefore, in finite being's dynamic capacity for self-transcendence in the unity-in-

⁷⁶ Cf., the triplex via of Dionysius the Areopagite which Aquinas follows. See *ST*, 1a.12.12. This starts with the positive relationship established by God in creation. Secondly, God is distinguished by way of negation so everything that characterises creation as effect – namely, its contingent finite reality – is removed. Thirdly, all that is positive in the effect is in the cause pre-eminently. Aquinas clarifies that the most perfect of all things is existence itself. *ST*, 1a.4.2. Cf., Michael B. Ewbank, "Diverse Orderings of Dionysius's Triplex via by St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 52, (1990): 82-109.

⁷⁷ *TL2*, 134n.10. Cf., *GL1*, 244-245.

⁷⁸ *ST*, 1a.13.11.

⁷⁹ *GL5*, 635-636.

⁸⁰ *GL5*, 625.

difference between *esse* and essence/*ens*. Only in light of divine freedom does the latter become the ‘authentic “site of glory in metaphysics” in its deepest affirmation of Being.’⁸¹

This further specifies both a ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ polarity within finite being. We noted above how the ‘horizontal’ relationship between *esse* and essence points upwards beyond each of its parts as a dynamic concrete whole. This is each being’s constitutive relationship to God. It depends, however, on a prior downward movement of transcendence whereby God’s *esse* is immanent to each being as the source of its essential nature’s existence. The downward movement of divine transcendence thereby underpins the upward self-transcending dynamic oscillation of the horizontal *esse*-essence relationship. Balthasar labels this the ‘transcending immanence’ of worldly reality and the ‘transcendence immanencing’ of God which constitutes and shines within the latter.⁸²

Both the ‘horizontal’ *esse*-essence difference and the ‘vertical’ God-creation difference and their respective rhythms and intersection are integral to the analogy of being and so crucial to understanding the determinate reality of anything that exists. Indeed, they are themselves related in analogical terms. This represents a more comprehensive form of the analogy of being. In articulating this Balthasar is influenced by Przywara’s notion of the analogy of being and his interpretation of the Fourth Lateran Council’s edict: ‘between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying a greater dissimilitude.’⁸³ Balthasar affirms how Przywara defends the abiding dissimilarity between God and creation. Thus, ‘[b]etween the divine and the created natures there is an essential abyss. It cannot be circumvented.’⁸⁴ However, nuancing Przywara’s emphasis on the ever-greater dissimilarity in similarity, Balthasar stresses how this dissimilarity always shows itself concretely in the similarity.⁸⁵ This echoes how created being is itself the site of the glory of divine

⁸¹ *GL5*, 625. Cf., *GL5*, 636.

⁸² *TL2*, 84. Cf., *GL2*, 294, where Balthasar refers to an ‘upwards-tending’ and ‘downwards-tending’ analogy; and, *TL2*, 171-218, where he distinguishes these as analogical and katalogical, respectively.

⁸³ Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 269 (§806). Przywara translates this as ‘one cannot note any similarity between Creator and creature, however great, without being compelled to note an ever-greater dissimilarity between them.’ Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 73n.201, comments that some manuscripts do not include ‘however great’ while noting Przywara’s preference to include it. Balthasar also notes this. See *TL2*, 95n.16, and *TD3*, 220n.51.

⁸⁴ *TD3*, 220. Cf., *TD 3*, 525.

⁸⁵ Przywara consistently states that the ever-greater dissimilarity between God and creature obtains *within* every similarity between them, however great. See *Analogia Entis*, 374. Balthasar’s judges, however, that Przywara’s stresses the dissimilarity ‘to the point of exaggeration.’ *TD3*, 220. Cf., *TD3*, 220n.51; and *TL2*, 95n.16. Betz, introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 113n.312, labels the tension between Przywara and Balthasar as that of the apophatic and kataphatic, respectively. This, however, should not obscure how Przywara’s insistence on greater dissimilarity arises from treating the immanent analogy principally as the essential polarity of essence-in-and-beyond-existence in which divine and created essences are incommensurable. He treats the existential polarity, i.e., existence-in-and-beyond-essence, less comprehensively and principally in

freedom.⁸⁶ As he states, '[e]ach basic property of Being points beyond its philosophical to its theological aspect....in such a way that in the *similitudo* the *major dissimilitudo* would be clear....But this *major dissimilitudo* would have to be continually revealed within the *similitudo*....'⁸⁷

Understanding the relationship of the dissimilarity between God and creation within the similarity represents Balthasar's adaptation of another aspect of the traditional understanding of the analogy of being, namely, the analogy of proportionality which qualifies the analogy of attribution mentioned above. Here two things in relationship are proportionally like two other things in relationship based upon a comparison of the two different proportions between each pair. This stresses the greater dissimilarity between the things being compared since they are only like each other according to this relationship of proportionality. There is no shared proportion between them. For God and creation, this affirms a relationship of proportionality between the unity-in-difference between essence and *esse* in created being and the identity of essence and *esse* in the divine.⁸⁸ This cannot mean that God's being is attained abstractly by essentialising in univocal terms the actuality of created *esse* along the lines of essence understood within creation.⁸⁹ Rather, the analogy rests on two wholly different relationships of being where one (divine being) is the origin of the other (created being) but in no way dependent on it. As Balthasar says, '[t]he ontological difference [between being and beings]...originates both from nonsubsistent and from subsistent (divine) being; in that sense, it reveals both a *similitudo* (insofar as the multiplicity of creatures is one in *esse*) and a *maior dissimilitudo*, insofar as nondivine being necessarily cleaves in two and stands over against the divine identity in the form of a nonidentity.'⁹⁰ Balthasar emphasises, however, the importance of directing the analogy of proportionality back to the similitudo wherein it is unveiled. The 'proportionality between God and the creature does not affect the fact that the creature owes its entire being (both essence and existence) to God, by *analogia attributionis*.'⁹¹ Indeed, this indicates

terms of facticity not *esse*'s superabundance. Balthasar's focus on the intimacy between God and creation as rooted in *esse* differs markedly.

⁸⁶ Cf., *TL2*, 273.

⁸⁷ *E*, 89.

⁸⁸ *TD3*, 221n52. Cf., *GL4*, 409: 'the creature itself is essentially a *proportio* between *esse* and *essentia*, so that its proportion in relation to God becomes 'the proportion of a proportion', what Thomas calls *proportionalitas*, a suspension of a suspension.'

⁸⁹ *E*, 92: The 'attribution of such an identity to God would remain a failed attempted to think in the direction of God....' Cf., *TL2*, 134n.10 and *GL1*, 244-245.

⁹⁰ *TL2*, 183. On how the ontological difference originates both from nonsubsistent created *esse* and from subsistent divine *esse*, see the next section.

⁹¹ *TD3*, 221n52. Cf., Schrijver, *Le Merveilleux Accord*, 52-57: affirms how Balthasar employs the analogy of intrinsic attribution within an analogy of proportionality. Here Balthasar distinguishes himself from Przywara. E.g., *TL2*, 95n.16, where he critiques Przywara's understanding that the ever-greater dissimilarity bursts open every similarity of the creature to God. Balthasar, however, is closer to Przywara than he realises. The latter attributes to human activity the pattern of God's ever-greater dissimilarity within every similarity. This

a second descending analogy of attribution wherein the ever-greater difference between God and creation is revealed immanently in created reality.

The concern underlying this comprehensive form of the analogy of being, as one of God's ontological priority and the greater dissimilarity between God and creation unveiled within their relationship, is to be vigilant about collapsing the difference between God and creation/humanity, and undermining their respective freedom and integrity. This seeks to ensure not only that God is always affirmed as God, but to articulate what this means for how the analogy manifests itself in intra-creaturely terms as the dynamic relationship between essence and existence/*esse* that points to God who is beyond all as the source of all, and, therefore, in all. This reinforces how the three aspects of the analogy of being mentioned above, namely, the horizontal, the upward vertical relationship (as an ascending analogy of attribution) and the downward vertical relationship of dissimilarity within similarity (as an analogy of proportionality manifested in a descending analogy of attribution) cohere in a fourth aspect. They together constitute the single complex yet concrete primal *Gestalt* of created being. As Balthasar says: 'through the greater dissimilarity of the finite and the infinite existent, the positive aspect of the *analogia entis* appears, which makes of the finite the shadow, trace, likeness and image of the Infinite.'⁹² The dissimilarity between God and creation, therefore, cannot be a sheer negative absence that places God wholly outside creation. Rather, it is manifested within the similarity between God and creation according to an intelligible pattern of being and action that affirms the integrity of creaturely becoming within its creaturely limits and ontological difference from God. God, who is in no way dependent on created being, fully and freely acts in every creature's activity as the source of creaturely being, activity and freedom. For the creature this means its own activity is a matter of openness to the act of divine being.⁹³

'establishes a new "attributive" analogy..., but one that proceeds not, as in the first moment, from below to above, but rather from above to below.' This new attributive analogical is manifest as a 'realm of service.' *Analogia Entis*, 235.

⁹² *GL5*, 627.

⁹³ For the non-competitiveness between divine and created causality, see Jacob Schmutz, "The Medieval Doctrine of Causality and the Theology of Pure Nature (13th to 17th Centuries)," in *Surnaturel: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino (Ave Maria: Sapientia Press, 2009), 205-211. Cf., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Three: Providence*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Hanover House, 1956), III.70.

2.4.3. *The doctrine of creation and esse as gift of divine love*

To specify further this comprehensive analogical interaction of freedoms intrinsic to the relationship between finite and infinite being, Balthasar employs a notion central to his metaphysics: gift.⁹⁴ Here the boundary between a philosophical and theological metaphysics becomes increasingly porous as the metaphysics of gift is explicitly rooted in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. This doctrine associates a metaphysical notion of gift with the act of creation where God is the giver of *esse* to each being. Finite *esse* is the ‘most extravagant gift’ to each being of participation in the divine *esse*.⁹⁵

Balthasar explains the gift-aspect of finite *esse* by locating the superabundance of *esse*’s actuality first in God. Divine *esse* is characterised as self-subsisting *esse* since the divine nature is always already fully actualised: ‘Nothing is richer and fuller than Being in its incomprehensibly glorious and absolute victory over nothingness...and yet this fullness can unfold absolutely only once: in God.’⁹⁶ Precisely because the divine *esse* is absolutely free self-subsisting superabundant actuality which lacks nothing and depends on nothing outside itself, God gives *esse* freely without being required to do so to actualise the divine essence. The divine *esse*, as fully subsisting actuality, is entirely self-communicating and so characterised as pure diffusive freedom that does not hold on to itself.

Finite *esse*, then, simply is divine *esse* wholly and freely given away as a gift of God’s self-giving *esse* thereby bringing non-divine being into existence through the gift of participation in the gift of divine *esse*.⁹⁷ The rich abundance of created *esse* is, therefore, an entirely selfless fullness that is also a pure potency that brings all into being. It is a pure selfless diffusion which does not hold onto itself.⁹⁸ Balthasar associates this pure gift of *esse* with love, that is, with love understood ontologically as the selfless, diffusive unlimited freedom of not-holding-on-to-itself at the heart of *esse*’s superabundance actuality. This ontological sense of love, moreover, finds its source in God. For if God ‘creates the world without constraint and imparts to it, with its unconstraining unconstrainedness, something of the manner of His freedom and sovereign power of gift, and if this bestowing freedom deserves no name but love: then from what other ground could God “be” than “from” love?’⁹⁹

⁹⁴ For gift’s metaphysical importance, see, Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 76-77; and, Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 53. Cf., Antonio López, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2014).

⁹⁵ *GL4*, 404.

⁹⁶ *GL5*, 625-626.

⁹⁷ *GL5*, 626.

⁹⁸ *GL5*, 627.

⁹⁹ *GL5*, 636.

Before pursuing further Balthasar's ontological rendering of love, more can be said about the doctrine of creation as a divine bestowal of *esse*. To the notion that finite *esse* is divine gift, the doctrine of creation adds the elements of, first, the personal freedom of the divine giver, and so emphasises the wholly gratuitous nature of the gift of *esse* which makes it a matter of love rather than necessity; and, secondly, the intellectual/spiritual creative depths of the same divine giver which accounts for the distinctive essential realities that are brought into existence by virtue of the gift of *esse*. Accordingly, the giving of *esse* as gift is now understood to be the result of the personal and spiritual freedom of the self-giving love of God which is one with the freedom of God's self-subsisting *esse*.¹⁰⁰ In doing so, God bestows the divine *esse* as personal gift whereby finite beings are brought into existence in their infinite difference from God according to God's creative power and imagination which is the creative source of their essential natures. Both essence and *esse* come from the same 'personal and free depths of self-giving absolute Being'.¹⁰¹

This affirms God's transcendence as the creator of both finite *esse* and finite essence, and yet precisely because this transcendence relates to each creature's *esse* and essential wholeness, it also affirms God's intimacy to each created being as the source of their *esse*. Hence,

God is the wholly other only as the non-aliud, the not-other (Nicolas of Cusa): as He who covers all finite entities with the one mantle of his indivisible Being in so far as they are able to participate in his reality at an infinite remove – as "entities", which are not Him, but which owe their possibility to his power, and their wealth to his creative freedom.¹⁰²

God as absolute freedom and creative self-giving absolute being is 'wholly other' as the source of the *esse* and essence of finite creatures. The latter, moreover, are other to God in their finitude through their participation in the gift of God's *esse* without which they cannot exist. But God's freedom as wholly other is also not-other precisely because creaturely *esse* is the divine *esse* bestowed and participated in as gift. God's wholly other freedom, therefore, is not a freedom that is wholly beyond creation *simpliciter*, but rather a freedom whose otherness beyond creation allows God to be uniquely immanent to creation as the source of its actuality. Creation, therefore, manifests God's self-giving within the freedom-in-dependency at the heart of finite being, and the self-transcending nature of this mutuality.

¹⁰⁰ Cf., *TL2*, 182.

¹⁰¹ *GL5*, 626.

¹⁰² *GL5*, 626.

3. Non-Subsistence of Finite *Esse* and Dignity of Finite Essence

Seeing finite *esse* as the personal gift of divine *esse* allows us to revisit more comprehensively Balthasar's understanding of finite *esse* as non-subsistent and the dignity of finite essences.

Given the above, finite *esse* is non-subsistent because it is pure gift, that is, the gift of participation in the gift of divine *esse*. Finite *esse* is, however, non-subsistent in two ways. First, the non-subsistence of finite *esse* is what distinguishes it from God's *esse* since the latter is identical to God's essence as self-subsisting *esse*. The divine act of creation out of nothing is the bestowal of divine *esse* as a free personal gift of participation. This is a personal decision to share that which God always already is – self-subsisting *esse*. This decision is not out of character but accords with how the divine *esse* in its fullness does not hold on to itself and expressive of God's nature as absolute, free and personal self-subsisting *esse*. Hence, God creates by bestowing his divine *esse* as gift, yet, precisely as gift, created *esse* is non-subsistent and so different from the *esse* identical to God's essence. As Balthasar says, the distinction between divine *esse* and created *esse* 'is only the oscillation between the giver and the gift, whereby gift signifies the being given (and being received) of the giver. Nothing substantial and subsistent, therefore, but the radiant fullness of God's Being [*esse*] in the condition of its being given to the finite recipient.'¹⁰³ What is given as finite *esse*, therefore, is God's *esse* received by finite essences as the gift they themselves are. This primary sense of finite *esse*'s non-subsistence constitutes the second way *esse* is non-subsistent, namely, finite *esse*'s dependency on created essences for subsistence even while created essences depend on the gift of *esse* for the actuality of their existence as instantiated by actual beings.¹⁰⁴ This underpins how neither created essence nor created *esse* is absolute, since they both depend on each other in different ways where their mutual dependency points to and comes from God.

We can further specify the nature of finite *esse*'s causal relationship to essence. As Walker notes, *esse* can be seen as a 'quasi- or supra-formal cause' of essence.¹⁰⁵ This reflects, first, that *esse* does not simply bestow the actuality of existence on essential forms from the outside, as per an external efficient cause, but does so as each essence's actuality even as *esse* depends on the resultant entity for its subsistence. Secondly, the actuality which *esse* bestows is characterised by a pattern, namely, the utterly selfless gift-like diffusion of not-holding-on-to-oneself. The pattern of finite *esse* reflects how *esse* 'never had any "self" to diffuse in the first place, but is always already "selfless," viz. non-

¹⁰³ *GL5*, 631.

¹⁰⁴ Cf., *GL4*, 374; and, *TL2*, 182.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, "Love Alone," 24-25n.19.

subsistent.¹⁰⁶ This aligns with, but is distinct from, the pattern of being's primal *Gestalt* as it appears in the *Gestalten* of actual beings since this *Gestalt* also encompasses each being's essence.

Accordingly, *esse*, does not exist-in-itself, but only in essences and so subsists either as created beings or divine being where non-subsistent created *esse* is a participation in the self-subsisting divine *esse*. It is the dual non-subsistence of finite *esse* as divine gift that underpins, for Balthasar, being's analogous nature. There is no standalone univocal pure *esse*. There is either infinite divine *esse* which is subsistent because identical to fully actualised divine essence; or, finite created *esse* which subsists only in a plurality of created essences and, therefore, as instantiated in actual beings. This emphasises how the free gift of God's *esse* aims 'at the necessary plurality and manifoldness of created essences, since nonsubsistent being could not attain to subsistence in one essence without being God....'¹⁰⁷ The difference between divine and created being, therefore, is between free self-subsisting *esse* and utterly contingent non-subsisting *esse* subsisting in contingent essences. *Esse* considered apart from God or created essences is non-subsistent and so nothing-in-itself. Or, rather, in terms borrowed from Ferdinand Ulrich, it is the 'pure mediation' between God and creation.¹⁰⁸ This pure mediation of *esse* and its dependence on essence is, moreover, what allows the positive difference between God (as the identity of *esse* and essence) and finite being (as comprised of the contingent relationship and difference between *esse* and essence) to be affirmed in their very intimacy.¹⁰⁹ The radical nearness of God to creation reflects how, as Walker states, '*esse creatum would have been* God's being, except that it is always already given away as the "pure mediation" (Ferdinand Ulrich) of God's self-communication – and so is one with its Archetype only within this radical "given awayness,"....'¹¹⁰ Thus, created being is closest to God when it acknowledges its difference from God as the source of created *esse* and essence in their unity-in-difference. It is in affirming their difference from God that humans paradoxically encounter and articulate being as divine gift where, as I examine later, this is especially apparent in how a new child is welcomed.

¹⁰⁶ Walker, "Love Alone," 31-32n.29.

¹⁰⁷ *TL2*, 182.

¹⁰⁸ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 17, 23-24. Cf., *DST*, 53n71; Healy, *Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 45-53. This is based on Aquinas: 'there can be no medium between created and uncreated.' *De Veritate*, 8.17.

¹⁰⁹ This is echoed by Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 43, for whom the ontological difference simply is the creator/created difference where 'each creature is internally constituted out of nothing as that difference.' Cf., Te Velde, *God*, 146n.49, who argues that for Aquinas creation participates in a 'similitude' of divine being to avoid pantheism. John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 100-102n.196, argues this undermines the intimacy between God and creation. Balthasar's position supports Milbank. His distinction between created non-subsistent *esse* and divine subsistent *esse* affirms the (mediated) immediacy of the relationship between the divine and created. Cf., *GL4*, 374.

¹¹⁰ Walker, "Love Alone," 24-25n.19.

Turning to reconsider finite essences, finite *esse*'s non-subsistence simultaneously underpins and yet also presumes the dignity and irreducible depth of created essences in their difference from *esse*. As we have seen, created *esse* depends on the essences for its subsistence in actual beings and is only expressed through their activity. The non-subsistent yet unlimited actuality of *esse* here requires a similarly inexhaustible depth to each being's essence within the latter's determined limits. The non-subsistence of *esse* as divine gift means that the superabundant glory of the fullness of *esse* is not held onto but bestowed upon each being and shines from within the inexhaustible depths of the essences of finite beings as manifested in the beauty of the *Gestalten* of their outward appearance.¹¹¹ This depth of determinate essence is not a fixed essentialism complete-in-itself, but rather more-than-determinate, something which is expressed in the rich fruitfulness of each being's appearance and actions as it participates in and communicates the divine gift of *esse*.¹¹² Each creature, therefore, fulfils its essential nature beyond itself through its interactions with other beings whereby all participate in *esse*'s trans-essentiality. As Balthasar says, this means essence is dramatic.¹¹³ In light of the fourth difference, this essential drama is, at its core, about sharing *esse* freely as divine gift. The glory of *esse* shining through the beauty of the super-determinate essential reality of individual beings is, therefore, attendant upon *esse* as divine gift and how beings participate in, appropriate and dramatically share *esse* as gift in their natures and interactions.¹¹⁴ As I examine in chapter three, a dramatic understanding of human essence as participating in *esse* as divine gift allows us to consider the fruit of human activity to discover more about human essence. There I take the fruit of a child as the prism through which to examine what is disclosed about the essential reality of sexual difference as it fruitfully communicates *esse* as divine gift within the self-transcending dramatic form of human nature.

The depth and dignity of the essences of actual beings in their dramatic enactment of *esse* reiterates the fact that created essences do not simply emerge from *esse*. They cannot be accounted for as the self-explication of created *esse* but point to God as their ultimate source. The reason for the essential reality of beings is, therefore, entirely positive. As Balthasar says, echoing Aquinas:

[a]llowing natures to participate in reality – God's most proper prerogative – is not to be understood as the disintegration or diminution (on the part of the creature) of God's being and unicity...and the essences of things must not appear as simply the fragmentation of

¹¹¹ I examine this more fully in chapter four.

¹¹² Cf., Walker, "Love Alone," 31-32n.29.

¹¹³ *TD2*, 335.

¹¹⁴ Cf., *GL5*, 632.

reality, in a negative sense, but must be seen positively as posited and determined by God's omnipotent freedom and therefore are grounded in the unique love of God.¹¹⁵

Balthasar thus strongly affirms the dignity of created essences as a function of the difference between God and finite *esse*, where finite essences are brought into existence by the gift of divine *esse* and determined by God's creative freedom and grounded in God's love. Finite *esse*'s dependence on the irreducibility and depth of finite essences for subsistence both constitutes and quickens the polar unity of finite being in its dynamic fruitfulness as a participation in God's being as a matter of loving gift. In their very difference from finite *esse*, essences 'are caught up into the dynamic of gift carried in *esse* as "dependent actualization," so that the creature's exercise of *esse*, its subsistence, is a "having-received-oneself-from-God-into-a-dynamic-of-self-gift."¹¹⁶ This recalls the first difference. The dramatic interaction between *esse* as non-subsistent actuality and essence as inexhaustible depth, which participates in *esse*'s selfless diffusiveness as divine gift, accounts for both a child's very existence and the constituent elements of the experience of primal wonder that characterises the child's first encounter with being as whole, including its own being and self-consciousness, in its mother's personal gift of love.

4. Letting Be and Metaphysical Love

We can now consider more fully Balthasar's notion of 'letting be' with which he characterises the child's first self-conscious awakening to itself and to being as a whole.¹¹⁷ This 'letting be' reflects the

¹¹⁵ *GL4*, 404.

¹¹⁶ Walker, "Love Alone," 24-25n.19.

¹¹⁷ Balthasar's German term for 'letting be' is *Gelassenheit*. This has roots in Meister Eckhart whom Balthasar critically engages with at *GL5*, 36-39. At *GL5*, 49, Balthasar finds an analogue with Greek tragedy's jointly active and passive sense of patience perseverance (*hypomone*). He also appropriates Ignatius of Loyola's notion of *indiferencia*. *GL5*, 102-113. At *E*, 36, Balthasar describes it as an 'offer of *readiness*.' He also clarifies it is 'neither resignation, nor detachment but surrender alone.' Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Therese of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Dennis Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) 182. Finally, linking being with *Gelassenheit* is something Balthasar adapts from Heidegger. See *GL5*, 438-439. Cf., Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper, 1966). Unlike Heidegger, Balthasar's notion of letting be is intrinsically tied up with love. See also *MW*, 81. For the significance of letting be, cf., Werner Löser, "The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Word*, ed. David L. Schindler, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 115-120; Cyril O'Regan, "Von Balthasar's Valorization and Critique of Heidegger's Genealogy of Modernity," in *Christian Spirituality and the Culture of Modernity: The Thought of Louis Dupré*, ed. Peter J. Casarella and George P. Schner, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 123-158; Cyril O'Regan, "Balthasar And Eckhart: Theological Principles And Catholicity," *The Thomist* 60, (1996): 210-224; and, Jacques Servais, *Théologie des exercices spirituels: Hans Urs von Balthasar interprète saint Ignace* (Brussels: Culture et Vérité, 1996). As Schumacher, *Trinitarian Anthropology*, 113 notes, the emphasis on an Ignatian sense of letting be foregrounds obedience and so the will compared to Dominican spirituality 'wherein the act of the will necessarily follows upon the act of reason....' Quash interprets Balthasar's insistence on indifferent obedience negatively. Quash, *Drama of History*, 78, 131. As Schumacher, *Trinitarian Anthropology*, 116-117 shows, however, Balthasar's

mutual interaction between non-subsistent *esse* and finite beings as the giving and receiving of *esse* as divine gift as instantiated in and communicated within each being's concrete essence and activity. Balthasar refers to this giving and receiving of *esse*, or pure not-holding-onto-itself-but-letting-be, as the communication or word of being [*esse*]. This ontological communication applies to all beings in their participation of *esse*. It is distinguished from language or speech, even if the two are related. As Balthasar says, this is 'a communication which points beyond all formulated and formulatable speech to the origin of the communication and thus also to the origin of the facility of speech of spiritual beings.'¹¹⁸ Given this, *esse's* communication is a letting be that brings everything into existence as a matter of freedom and gift which, for humans, is encountered and communicated in wonder. Thus understood, concerning the first difference,

[t]he communications 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. It emerges within the first distinction, communicates itself in the second to all co-existent entities and, in the third, grasps Being itself. Because no existent thing can be deduced by necessity from Being, but nevertheless exists in that it partakes in Being, and because this participation and sharing are two aspects of one and the same incomprehensible (because not able to be grounded within itself) oscillation, therefore the word of Being is itself the permission to be.¹¹⁹

A child's awakening to self-conscious existence and to being thus discloses the differences that constitute finite being. In elaborating this, Balthasar weaves together a set of closely related terms that express finite being's polar unity as a dynamic of giving and receiving. Hence, first, concerning both *esse* and *entia*, he links, on the one hand, the notions of giving, fullness and actuality; and, on the other hand, letting be, poverty, and receptivity. Secondly, these different ways of expressing the mutuality intrinsic to finite being are encompassed within the notion of love understood ontologically which underpins the ontic interactions between finite beings. Thus, beings are engaged with each other through a mutual letting be, or giving and receiving, which ultimately flows from an ontological notion of love. This ontic expression of the ontological rhythm between *esse* and essence as love, moreover, is most fully manifest in the loving interpersonal human relationships. Ontological

understanding of indifference is not indifferent to the natural inclinations of human nature but stresses that they only find their fulfilment in an infinite freedom. Cf., *TD2*, 211; *TL3*, 270; *E*, 121.

¹¹⁸ *GL5*, 633.

¹¹⁹ *GL5*, 633.

love, which has its source in the personal gift of divine being, therefore, both undergirds and is fully manifested in interpersonal love. Let us consider these aspects more fully.

4.1. *The fullness and poverty of letting be*

Balthasar frames the dynamic interaction of finite *esse* and finite essence as a joint fullness and poverty that echoes God's own gift of being.¹²⁰ He states,

God-given being is both fullness and poverty at the same time: fullness as being without limit, poverty modelled ultimately on God himself, because he knows no holding on to himself, poverty in the act of being which is given out, which *as* gift delivers itself without defence (because here too it does not hold on to itself) to the finite entities.¹²¹

In its superabundant actuality and non-subsistence, finite *esse* as divine gift is simultaneously full and poor. *Esse's* poverty is a function of its fullness as pure selfless giving which holds onto nothing of itself but lets beings be in their distinctiveness. This poverty is reflected, moreover, in how *esse* only subsists in and so is dependent on and receptive to the essences of actual finite beings. Accordingly, poverty-as-receptivity (to essence) is intrinsic to the fullness of *esse's* actuality.¹²² This makes receptivity a perfection of *esse*.¹²³ As Healy says: '[w]hile the receptivity of essence as such belongs to essence, not to *esse*, that receptivity has an analogous correspondent in *esse's* non-subsistence, which it manifests, so to speak, in depending on the receptivity of essence at the moment it confers upon this receptivity the status of being.'¹²⁴

The fullness and poverty of *esse* is, moreover, echoed in the essential reality of *entia* wherein *esse* finds subsistence.¹²⁵ Thus, on the one hand, there is a fullness to each being's essence. In the latter's receptivity to the gift of *esse's* fullness, as the cause of its existence, each essence exhibits an interior fullness or depth. This echoes the more-than-determinate character of essences, mentioned

¹²⁰ Balthasar here follows Ulrich. See, e.g., Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 50, 73,81 Cf., *GL5*, 625.

¹²¹ *GL5*, 626-627.

¹²² This insight is significant for our later discussion in chapter three regarding sexual difference, not least because Balthasar problematically associates such metaphysical receptivity univocally with the feminine.

¹²³ Healy, *Eschatology*, 72-81. Healy references a series of articles in *Communio: International Review* which discuss receptivity as a perfection. See David L. Schindler, "Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20, (1993): 580-592; W. Norris Clarke, "Response to David Schindler's Comments," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20, (1993): 593-598; Stephen A. Long, "Divine and Creaturely "Receptivity": The Search for a Middle Term," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21, (1994): 151-161; George A. Blair, "On *Esse* and Relation," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21, (1994): 162-164; W. Norris Clarke, "Response to Long's Comments" and "Response to Blair's Comments," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21, (1994): 165-171; and, David L. Schindler, "The Person: Philosophy, Theology, and Receptivity," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21, (1994): 172-190.

¹²⁴ Healy, *Eschatology*, 80.

¹²⁵ *GL5*, 627.

earlier, which here matches the poverty-in-fullness of *esse* as it subsists in individual essences. On the other hand, *entia* are limited by their essences and the actions which flow from them. Balthasar thus uses poverty of essences, firstly, to denote a limit whereby actual beings can never encompass the totality of *esse*'s superabundant actuality within themselves since this would reduce *esse* to their essential reality. This, however, indicates a second sense of the poverty of essence's which echoes *esse*'s poverty-in-fullness, namely, selfless diffusive not-holding-on-it-itself.

This second sense of the poverty of essences repeats, therefore, within the essential order, *esse*'s own fullness and actuality insofar each being communicates *esse*'s character as letting be. Hence, each finite being in its essential activity makes *esse*'s fullness as self-giving poverty and receptivity their own. This again challenges any fixed essentialism. No being exists first as a self-enclosed entity which then in a second extrinsic moment passes *esse* on.¹²⁶ Rather, finite beings come into existence as already active in their essential natures, and as outwardly oriented to letting *esse* be, in their prior receipt of the gift of *esse*. Hence, each being is constituted 'by virtue of an ekstasis out of its own closed self, and therefore through dispossession and poverty becomes capable of salvaging in recognition and affirmation the infinite poverty of the fullness of being and, within it, that of the God who does not hold on to himself.'¹²⁷ A being's poverty, receptivity and self-emptying are, therefore, a function of the prior fullness of the actuality of *esse* as divine gift which does not hold onto itself. They do not denote a lack or loss vis-à-vis finite being, but a fullness and fruitfulness which is expressed within each being's essential reality and activity as a generous handing on and receiving. This manifests itself in the fruitfulness of the shared fullness-in-poverty that is the giving and receiving between actual beings.

To wed this understanding of the joint letting be of *esse* and essence with the earlier points regarding the non-subsistence of *esse* and the inexhaustibility of essence, this sense of finite beings letting *esse* be in their essential actions not only expresses the richness of the non-subsistent character of *esse* as gift selflessly given away. It also expresses and constitutes in ever-new ways the inexhaustible depths and rich interiority of finite essences, powering each being's essential self-expression and fulfilment through its actions. Essences, in turn, are thereby significant because they disclose 'what the self-diffusion of *esse* "looks like" when it is "instantiated" in concrete *ens* as its subsistent supposit. For the concrete *ens*, which provides the "missing self" for *esse*'s self-diffusion,

¹²⁶ Cf., Te Velde, *God*, 145n.47, who clarifies that *esse* is not limited by the receiving principle of essence, suggesting the pre-existence of essence aside from *esse* but is rather contracted to a determinate nature. Balthasar, *TL2*, 182, echoes this: 'the whole is said to be created (it is not as though the essence were a mere idea of God that he then realized by adding being to it)....'

¹²⁷ *GL5*, 627.

is...caught up into *esse*'s dynamic self-diffusion, and so exists in itself only to the extent that it also exists outside of itself, and vice versa, in a reciprocity of ecstasy and entasy.¹²⁸ The mutual letting be that occurs between *esse* and *entia* thus manifests itself in how the interior depth of each being is expressed outwardly in its participation in *esse*'s rich poverty as shared with other beings.

In more concretely human terms, recalling the fourfold's first difference where a child is welcomed and permitted to be by its parents, being's fullness and poverty as divine gift underpins, metaphysically, how the poverty, dependence and receptivity of childhood are not a matter of lack. Rather they coincide with an original fullness, freedom and self-giving at the heart of the dynamic reciprocal letting-be between *esse* and essence. Indeed, this metaphysical letting-be aligns primordially, in human terms, with the paradigmatic significance of being childlike in dependence on others' gift of *esse*. This matches how a child in its receptivity and poverty – as it is conceived, born and awoken by others in wonder – lets the fullness of *esse* be in a way that is a wholly positive and active expression of the depths of the child's human nature in its openness to others, *esse* and God. Moreover, since this concerns the way human nature as spirit ecstatically participates in the fullness-in-poverty of being's own ecstatic *Gestalt*, its very childlike character can, metaphysically-speaking, never be superseded. The wonder of each child is wholly transparent to the divine gift of *esse* as enacted in human essence's openness to God-given *esse*. No-one can jettison being childlike, therefore, without forfeiting *esse*'s own character as divine gift freely given away and manifested in the rich poverty of created essences. Where childlike wonder is rejected, so is this vision of *esse*'s glorious letting be and the dignity of essences. This insight into the paradigmatic childlike character of being's letting be as divine gift stresses that fully human activity is one that remains open to *esse* and hands it on with childlike wonder. Act, says Balthasar, 'as if you yourself, your fellow-man and fellow-object owed your existence to a boundless grace.'¹²⁹

Beyond the human, this discloses a metaphysical vision of being whereby it is within the concrete interaction between beings, in their giving and receiving of each other in their shared poverty and wealth, that *esse* is received and given as divine gift and finds subsistence in the variety of different beings – in short, where *esse* is exchanged fruitfully. Such shared letting-be encompasses a reciprocal notion of action where the interaction between beings always involves a mutuality of movements of letting be in dramatic events of encounter that open beyond themselves: the movement of the one who 'lets', 'allows', or 'permits'; and the movement of the one who 'is let be'. The simultaneity of these movements in one act means they are reversible. The one who 'is let be' is

¹²⁸ Walker, "Love Alone," 31-32n.29.

¹²⁹ *GL5*, 633.

also one who 'lets', 'allows,' or 'permits,' and vice versa. There is, therefore, a co-agency in every such encounter where each agent's actions are not simply consecutive but simultaneous, even if there is abiding asymmetry between them and the whole shared event fruitfully exceeds both contributions. As we shall examine later in this thesis, this sense of asymmetrical co-agency between beings, where subject and object are jointly active and receptive in the letting be of *esse* according to the depths of their essential natures, is crucial to how Balthasar's metaphysics is concretely rooted in and affirms the fruitful mutuality of the sexes and the child-parent relationship. Here the fruit of a new child's existence and wonder disclose afresh *esse's* diffusiveness as a gift of divine love.

4.2. Love as metaphysical reality

As mentioned already, Balthasar understands this active giving and receiving intrinsic to being most comprehensively as love. As Balthasar says,

[o]nly a philosophy of freedom and love can account for our existence, though not unless it also interprets the essence of finite being in terms of love. In terms of love – and not, in the final analysis, in terms of consciousness, or spirit, or knowledge or power, or desire, or usefulness. Rather, all of these must be seen as ways toward and presuppositions for the single fulfilling act that comes to light in a superabundant way in the sign of God. Thus, beyond existence in general and beyond the composition of essence, a light breaks on the constitution of being itself, insofar as it subsists in no other way than in the "refusal-to-cling-to-itself", in the emptying of itself into the finite and concrete, while finite entities in turn are able to receive and retain it, as it is in itself, only as that which does not hold onto itself. Finite beings are thus trained by it in giving themselves away in love. One's consciousness, one's self-possession and possession of being, can grow only and precisely to the extent that one breaks out of being in and for oneself in the act of communication, in exchange, and in human and cosmic *sympatheia*.¹³⁰

Interpreting 'refusal-to-cling-to-itself' or letting be of created *esse* as love incorporates a triple sense of the genitive. First, the letting be of love belongs to *esse* as such. Secondly, this arises from *esse's* character as the free personal gift of participation in God's fully actualised *esse* bestowed as gift. Thirdly, each being in its essential nature and activity lets the gift of created *esse* be and hands *esse* on, thereby expressing its essential participation in *esse*. This sense of love as letting be, therefore, applies simultaneously on an theological level – as characteristic of God's fully actualised *esse* –, on

¹³⁰ LAC, 143-144.

an ontological level – as pertaining to the nature of created being – and on an ontic level – as characterising the interaction between beings and so the community of all beings wherein *esse*'s non-subsistent diffusive letting be actively subsists.

Here we can distinguish between how various beings participate in and give subsistence to the selfless diffusion of *esse* according to their essential natures. Beyond inanimate objects, plants and animals, humans are uniquely placed to hand on *esse* as free self-conscious personal gift, that is, as a gift of love, because they possess the greatest level of freedom given their embodied spiritual nature. Such love represents an act of the whole person open to *esse*, other beings and God. As Balthasar says, 'love means here the total human act which comprehends the totality of mind and body, and in particular, percipient intelligence. As metaphysical intelligence, it perceives the relation of the existent and Being which defies formulation and, as Christian intelligence, it perceives God's free word of absolute love which utters itself as a medium within this relation.'¹³¹ Through their own acts of love, humans encounter and share the divine personal self-giving at the core of finite *esse* where this relationship to God's personal giving is, conversely, always mediated via *esse* and so necessarily entails interaction with all other beings that participate in *esse*. Indeed, it is in communities of concrete persons, as an intensification of the community of all beings, that the letting-be of *esse* can be fully and concretely manifested as love. This has, moreover, a concrete beginning for each person, recalling the first difference between a child and its mother. It is through the self-giving love of its mother, which is her personal loving gift of *esse* as subsisting in their shared essential nature, that the child awakens to the gift character of its participated *esse* which it shares with all others.

5. Conclusion

I conclude with some observations on the connection between the interpersonal, the anthropological, and the ontological within Balthasar's fourfold difference, and how this relates to the basic task of metaphysics as Balthasar conceives of it: to serve the wonder of being itself.

First, the fourfold difference affirms an intrinsic link between interpersonal human relationships and the dynamic complex character of finite being. The ontological and interpersonal illuminate and mediate each other. Thus, Balthasar's account of the analogical nature of finite being underpins and discloses the ontological nature of interpersonal relationships by emphasising the self-diffusive letting be of *esse* and the dignity and depth of the essential reality of beings, both personal and non-personal. The interpersonal, by contrast, fully unveils at the heart of being the coincidence between

¹³¹ *GL5*, 637.

freedom and interdependence, and the giving and receiving characteristic of love. The interpersonal and ontological are, therefore, not extrinsically related. The interpersonal is the privileged instance of the dynamic between *esse* and *entia*. It concerns humans who, as embodied spirits, participate most fully in the letting be of *esse* through personal self-giving love. Humans, however, stand at a threshold. They can willingly act in openness to *esse* as free self-diffusive personal gift shared with others in love; or, deny the gift character of *esse*, splintering the intrinsic relationship between the personal and the ontological.

Secondly, therefore, a willing mediation of *esse* as gift is not simply about personal volition, as if it were reducible to one or more aspects of humanity's spiritual nature. Rather, a person shares *esse* fully with their whole spiritual embodied nature. This also includes how the letting be of *esse* is shared in concrete encounters between actual beings. The interpersonal participation in *esse* cannot, therefore, be divorced from the anthropological understanding of human nature as dependent on others for its self-conscious openness to being. Hence the significance Balthasar allots to the beginning of each child's self-conscious existence where it awakens to its capacity to grasp *esse* in wonder through its mother's love. This is not a function of choice, but rather moves the child's whole spiritual nature in a way that allows the child to move itself, thereby underpinning its freedom. Accordingly, the coincidence of self-conscious freedom and interdependence for each person's expression of the selfless letting-be of *esse* as love goes beyond a tension between the necessity of nature and the freedom of choice. Rather, it bespeaks a freedom borne out of loving dependency. The spirit's free communication of *esse* in love is prior to and enables any deliberate willed action, even if it only ever comes fully to expression in such free personal action in openness to *esse*. As Balthasar explains, 'Love loves Being in an *a priori* way.... It receives it as a free gift and replies with free gratitude.'¹³² Each person enacts the letting-be which characterises both the free gift of *esse* and their nature's spiritual freedom by 'lending their own love, in the *concretissimum* of the encounter with their brother, that universal breadth of Being which – consciously or not, explicitly or not – the metaphysical act possesses and is.'¹³³

Thirdly, the vision articulated above is not self-evident. It reflects underlying metaphysical convictions about the relationship between being and spirit which impact how being is encountered, shaped, known and communicated. What is decisive, on Balthasar's account, is whether finite being, finite self-consciousness and their relationship are characterised by loving gift and, therefore, whether being is actively and freely communicated as the interpersonal loving receipt and gift of

¹³² *GL5*, 647.

¹³³ *GL5*, 655.

esse as divine gift. Given this, the measure of any metaphysics for Balthasar is how it values the personal. Conversely, he is concerned that without a metaphysical vision based on affirming being's provenance as divine gift the human become a mere means to functional impersonal ends. Here personal love is reduced to cog in a 'transcendental, biological and evolutionistic or materialistic process...and there is no longer any reason why it should be better that something exist rather than simply nothing at all. What kind of gift can [then] the other person be for me?'¹³⁴ Balthasar is here worried about a predominately technological worldview which redefines human nature based solely on what humans can make of themselves and others for their own benefit.

By contrast, Balthasar promotes a contemplative view of the human spirit's openness to being which, however, is fully expressed in free creative action.¹³⁵ Rather than being products of and means towards our own fashioning, human action is to be receptive to being and other beings in love. Here being's analogical nature, and its fourfold pattern of difference, brings with it a service-oriented way of being. It is characterised by a service of the whole – the whole person, community, society, and world – based on 'the all-embracing openness' of humans to *esse* as its subsists in beings.¹³⁶ This reflects the basic task of metaphysics as a quintessential human vocation: guardianship of metaphysical wonderment.¹³⁷ This is, moreover, inseparable from safeguarding human personhood understood as the totality of humanity's embodied and spiritual nature engaging beyond itself with *esse's* transcendence.¹³⁸ This idea of metaphysics seeks to protect the freedom and gift-like character of *esse*, and the integrity of individual beings by living out in human existence the glorious indifference of *esse* as not-holding-onto-itself which all beings participate as divine gift.

This divine orientation means, moreover, that a metaphysics which seeks to guard the inviolable dignity of the human person as worthy of love cannot be separate from a theological service to God. The latter, who has no measure, provides the measure for how each person lives out their service to the world and others. For Balthasar, a person, as spirit, can only give the gift of themselves fully once and only the ever-greater reality of God meets this human capacity to exceed itself. This is not simply blind faith incumbent upon an act of will. Rather the 'gift of self is a response, to the one who is the ground of his being-permitted-to-be; to him who ultimately wants from man not things and

¹³⁴ *GL5*, 644.

¹³⁵ Cf., *GL5*, 650-651.

¹³⁶ *GL5*, 649.

¹³⁷ *GL5*, 646; 648.

¹³⁸ *GL5*, 655.

objects but his very self...'¹³⁹ This gift of one's whole self, moreover, occurs in a primordial and unrepeatable way in the child's awakening to itself, being and God through the love of another where this once-and-for-all gift underpins human self-conscious freedom and is fully taken up in the love shared between persons. Where culture, philosophy and, even, theology have lost sight of the wonder of being and beings, Balthasar sounds a hopeful yet urgent note about 'love's manifestation' in interpersonal relationships. Where being and concrete humanity are marginalized, such love can provide 'emergency rations' that open to God's absolute love.¹⁴⁰ This coincides with the importance of loving interpersonal relationships for living out and affirming the divinely-gifted nature of *esse*.

Finally, Balthasar insists that certain human interpersonal relationships have greater epiphanic significance, ontologically-speaking, and are, therefore, paradigmatic vis-à-vis handing on *esse* as loving divine gift. This is reflected, first, in the primordial metaphysical importance Balthasar attributes to the relationship between mother and child. This, however, presumes another human difference, namely, human sexual difference. A key question is how these two paradigmatic human relationships are related. In chapter two, I examine the significance Balthasar attributes to the childlike heart of human self-consciousness and in chapter three I explore the connection between the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference.

¹³⁹ *GL5*, 654.

¹⁴⁰ *GL5*, 649.

Chapter Two

The Heart's Filial Childlikeness

On Balthasar's metaphysical scheme, finite being is wholly characterised by the unity-in-difference between being's superabundant actuality (*esse*) and the essential reality of actual beings. As we examined in the previous chapter, Balthasar interprets this dynamically as an asymmetrical interdependence that opens ecstatically beyond itself. Given *creatio ex nihilo*, this self-transcending movement is judged by Balthasar to already be caught up in, exceeded, yet also the site of the prior gift of participation in the divine *esse* which calls all beings into being. Here the unity-in-difference of created being is unveiled to have its origin in a divine loving letting-be which is inscribed into created being and communicated anew in the interaction between actual beings. For Balthasar, this is expressed fully in the interpersonal love shared between humans for whom the encounter with the gift of being as manifested in actual beings is a source of wonder. Indeed, as we saw, Balthasar holds that the human spirit is first awoken to full self-consciousness, and, therefore, its metaphysical capacity to grasp the miracle of being in wonder, as a child in relationship to its mother.

In this chapter, I explore the implications of this wonder-filled childlike provenance of human self-conscious freedom for how humans encounter being. This acknowledges that we are the source of neither our being nor self-conscious freedom but receive them from others. Balthasar interprets this wholly positively as the gift of freedom that, in its dependency, is positively oriented to difference and sharing *esse* as gift. While each human is, therefore, an embodied spirit who participates in *esse*, their freely personal appropriation of this lies dormant until awoken from beyond through the concrete love of adults, typically, the child's mother. Her personal address moves the child's innermost core, precipitating its latent spiritual capacity to exceed itself in a wholly original manner, that is, with awareness of self and others in openness to being's fullness. This ecstatic movement engages all the child's faculties in a single, complex and self-transcending whole which Balthasar identifies with the human heart. Indeed, the manner of the heart's awakening imbues it with an abiding childlikeness that corresponds to its *a priori* yet gifted capacity for ontological wonder.

In this light, two aims guide this chapter. First, I examine how this account of self-consciousness ascribes a singularly positive metaphysical value to the dependence of the child's heart on its parents. Significantly, Balthasar applies this positive estimation not simply to childhood. To be an adult is to grow ever-more deeply into the truth of being a child who owes their existence and freedom to others as a matter of gift. Unlike children, adults can freely affirm or deny the gifted nature of their self-conscious freedom and their heart's childlikeness. For Balthasar, the latter

cannot be abandoned without doing violence to the human capacity for wonder wherein lies the ontological root of freedom. Balthasar thus takes a stand against modern and postmodern conceptions of self-conscious freedom characterised principally by autonomy, self-actualisation and adult independence. The latter promotes an original antagonism towards childhood inserted into the fabric of human self-consciousness.

Secondly, as a bastion against this, I show how Balthasar reaffirms the positive metaphysical significance of the child-parent relationship such that the human heart, and so human self-consciousness and its freedom, are engraved with a lasting childlike filial character which keeps the heart open to being's divine source. Being an adult means willingly recapitulating the truth of being a child as one who owes their existence and self-conscious freedom to their parents and God. This filial gratitude underpins every other interaction that seeks willingly to enact the positive sense of freedom-in-dependence which marks the human spirit's openness to being in wonder.

In what follows, first, I consider the value Balthasar attributes to childhood and the perspective of the child. Secondly, I give a formal account of Balthasar's understanding of the ontological nature of human self-conscious freedom and the centrality of the human heart. Thirdly, I examine the concrete content of how a child awakens to self-consciousness through the gift of another's love, typically its mother, and how this shapes the heart. Finally, I consider how the relationship between parents and children determines the metaphysical legacy bequeathed to each child in the form of the heart's openness to being. I show thereby the importance of affirming the heart's childlike and filial character for the human encounter with the wonder of being and beings, and, therefore, God. This also anticipates the next chapter's concern: the pivotal part played by the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference for the metaphysical task of safeguarding the wonder of being.

1. Value and Fragility of Childhood

Balthasar's metaphysical approach to childhood reflects his engagement with the thought of Gustav Siewerth and Ferdinand Ulrich, who, like Balthasar, approach the child-parent relationship from the standpoint of Thomist metaphysics in dialogue with modern philosophy.¹ Balthasar revisits this

¹ Cf., Gustav Siewerth, *Metaphysik der Kindheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1957); and, Ferdinand Ulrich, *Der Mensch als Anfang. Zur philosophischen Anthropologie der Kindheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970). See, in particular, *TL2*, 177-178. Cf., Florian Pitschl, "Unless you become like children': Ferdinand Ulrich's philosophical anthropology of childhood," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 22, (1995): 56-64. Balthasar is also influenced by Charles Péguy and Georges Bernanos. See, for example, *ExT5*, 223-224; *TD5*, 181-182. For a theological engagement, cf., John Saward, *The Way of the Lamb: The Spirit of Childhood and the*

theme in his last completed work, *Unless You Become Like This Child*.² The upshot of Balthasar's deepening engagement is that he affirms the unsurpassable positivity of a child's incipient wonder and 'the fragility of this originally inviolable dimension.'³

In *UBC*, Balthasar reiterates how a child's awakening to self-consciousness in wonder is determinative for adulthood wherein it is reclaimed afresh. This is 'the interior turning in the direction of spiritual childhood; towards...'birth from the spirit' or "rebirth from above", or, simply, "birth from God" (John 1:13).⁴ Balthasar finds theological warrant for this, first, in Jesus' attitude to the importance of children as evidenced in the Gospels. Secondly, it characterises Jesus' relationship to the God he calls Father who is ever-greater than the Son.⁵ Indeed, Balthasar claims that Jesus attributes to the experience of childhood 'a deeper and more authentic dimension of consciousness' than any other philosopher, religious founder or psychological model.⁶ This has profound metaphysical implications. As Balthasar notes, Jesus assumes this as 'something elementary, the condition for everything else!'⁷

Balthasar pits Christ's estimation of childhood against perspectives for which it is necessarily dispensable for maturity. Thus ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman views consider childhood as a "'not yet" stage'.⁸ In the ancient world, 'no one was concerned with the form of the human spirit, indeed the form of man's total spiritual-corporeal existence, that preceded free, moral decision-making.'⁹ This echoes Jean-Yves Lacoste's judgement that in 'the whole metaphysical tradition of the West, childhood can be defined only as lack.'¹⁰ This persists in a contemporary context that values independence, rational autonomy and self-actualisation as ideals.¹¹ Here childhood, along with its dependence on parents, needs to be outgrown.¹² This can be understood differently, for example, as: the need to ensure the child's inherent good develops free from external institutional

End of the Age (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999); and, Edmund Newey, *Children of God: The Child as Source of Theological Anthropology* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 190-197.

² This builds on treatments of this theme in *ExT5*, *GL5*, *TD2*, *TD3*, and *MTG*.

³ *UBC*, 13.

⁴ *UBC*, 11.

⁵ Cf., *UBC*, 47.

⁶ *UBC*, 28.

⁷ *UBC*, 9. Cf., *ExT5*, 205.

⁸ *UBC*, 12.

⁹ *UBC*, 12. Cf., *ExT5*, 205.

¹⁰ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 184. For a critical engagement with this tradition, see Gareth Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹¹ Cf., Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 575; 587-589.

¹² Some development psychology treats childhood as a distinct, positive stage. See, for example, Alison Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 9. This, however, does not consider childlikeness a fundamental human form.

interference;¹³ psychological recapitulation of human evolution;¹⁴ cognitive development based on structural changes marked by age-specific stages;¹⁵ or, moral growth based on autonomous reason guided by educative institutions.¹⁶ These perspectives judge childhood to be devoid of abiding value for being fully human. Childhood's essential dependency is a negative. For the sake of maturity, it must be overcome through adult reasoning, self-affirmation and self-making.¹⁷ Here, to assert childhood's abiding significance undermines adult freedom by imprisoning each person in passive servitude to others who exercise a domineering parental-like authority. This asserts a basic antagonism between the self-made adult and dependent childhood. Balthasar is particularly concerned with ideological perspectives that advocate a positivistic and technological view of human nature, emphasising 'the makability of man', 'self-fabrication,' and human mastery over matter.¹⁸ Compared to an anthropology rooted in the 'wondrous mystery of a child' where freedom flourishes in relationships of interdependence, especially those concerning a person's origin, these perspectives proffer a counter-image that Balthasar equates with the Jewish mythical creature of the Golem.¹⁹

Taken to an extreme, this negative view of childhood foments anti-natalism. This has precedent in an ancient Greek view, the so-called Wisdom of Silenus, which states 'the best thing...is not to be born...; however, the next best thing...is, after being born, to die as quickly as possible.'²⁰ It accords with an extreme outworking of the preference in modern philosophy for radical doubt and suspicion rather than wonder.²¹ Such anti-natalism reworks self-consciousness and its relationship to being in its own nihilistic image, rejecting from the outset spirit's participation in *esse* as divine gift.

¹³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or On Education*, trans. Allan David Bloom (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1950), 116-187.

¹⁵ Jean Piaget, *The Child's Construction of Quantities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

¹⁶ Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

¹⁷ This is how Ulrich, *Kindheit*, 14, characterises Karl Marx's view of childhood.

¹⁸ *UBC*, 43-46.

¹⁹ *UBC*, 43-44. The Golem is a being fashioned out of matter according to human designs, a trope utilised by Romantic writers and popular Western culture. Cf., Cathy S. Gelbin. *The Golem Returns: From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808-2008* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

²⁰ Aristotle, *Eudemus*, quoted in "A Letter of Condolence to Apollonius" in Plutarch, *Moralia Volume II*, Loeb Classical Library edition, trans. F. C. Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 115B-115E. Cf., Arthur Schopenhauer, "Contributions to the Doctrine of the Affirmation and Negation of the Will-to-live," in *Selected Essays of Schopenhauer*, ed. Ernest B. Bax (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1926), 269; and, Emil M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012).

²¹ See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy With Selection from the Objections and Replies*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15.

By contrast, Balthasar champions ‘the distinctive consciousness of children as a value in itself.’²² This encompasses

an original dimension in which everything unfolds within the bounds of the right, the true, the good, in a zone of hidden containment which cannot be derogated as “pre-ethical” or “unconscious”, as if the child’s spirit had not yet awakened or were still at the animal level – something it never was, not even in the mother’s womb. That zone..., on the contrary, reveals itself as a sphere of original wholeness and health, and it may be even said to contain an element of holiness, since at first the child cannot yet distinguish between parental and divine love.²³

This articulates Balthasar’s central insight into the importance of the child’s perspective for human self-consciousness.²⁴ The original dimension encapsulates in an embryonic whole the self-transcending gift-shape of the fourfold difference of finite being discussed in the previous chapter. Although Balthasar frames this here with reference to the good and the true, beauty is implicit as ‘the original dimension’ and ‘hidden containment’ which encompasses the true and the good.²⁵ Balthasar correlates this, moreover, to ‘the form of man’s total spiritual-corporeal existence’.²⁶ As I explain later in this chapter, this implicitly refers to the heart as the faculty of beauty, which precedes, underpins and is expressed in ‘free, moral decision-making...’²⁷

We can distinguish Balthasar’s standpoint from idealised accounts of childhood. This is something he explicitly critiques.²⁸ Christopher Denny, moreover, shows how the epigrams at the beginning of *UBC* implicitly critique a romanticised childhood. Balthasar quotes, first, Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg), ‘To be childlike: that is best of all’; and, second, Friedrich Hölderlin, ‘O would that I were as children are.’ These are accompanied, however, by destabilising attributions: ‘Novalis, shortly before his death,’ and ‘Hölderlin, already demented.’²⁹ Denny argues these ‘are coded attacks...upon an entire view of childhood that radiates from German idealism....’³⁰ Although Novalis and Hölderlin echo Balthasar in rejecting modern denials of childhood, they absolutize

²² *UBC*, 12.

²³ *UBC*, 12.

²⁴ Cf., Christophe Potworowski, “The attitude of the child in theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 22, (1995): 45.

²⁵ I examine this in chapter four.

²⁶ *UBC*, 12.

²⁷ *UBC*, 12.

²⁸ *UBC*, 15. Cf., Balthasar, *Two Sisters*, 145.

²⁹ *UBC*, 7.

³⁰ Christopher D. Denny, *A Generous Symphony: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Literary Revelations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 214.

childhood and remain enthralled to ‘an absolute idealism and its individualist conception of selfhood.’³¹ By contrast, Balthasar, refuses to make the child an absolute. He offers ‘a different anthropology of the child.... Instead, a child attains integration through interpersonal communion within the family, through a loving heteronomic parent who provides the gift of life.’³²

Simultaneous with the original wholeness of a child’s ontological wonder, Balthasar’s stresses its fragility: ‘in the human child this primal experience is shot through with an anguishing intimation of a deeper, more dangerous separation: the mother can be absent when needed; the child can experience what it would be like to be left alone....’³³ Prior to *UBC*, while Balthasar recognises this threat, he emphasises that nothing can detract from the metaphysical positivity and joy of a child’s awakening to self-consciousness.³⁴ While this retains priority in *UBC*, Balthasar also deepens the threat involved. Childhood ‘is fully vulnerable because the child is powerless, while those who care for him enjoy an all-powerful freedom....’³⁵ This recognises an element of truth in modern conceptions of self-consciousness that associate an abiding childlikeness with a threat to human freedom. There is a fundamental asymmetry between the child and adults who raise it. The response, however, cannot be to reject childhood so as to liberate self-consciousness for this would be to carry out, in freedom’s name, the very threat against freedom’s origin, giving this rejection of childhood metaphysical purchase as necessary for full self-consciousness. Indeed, it implicitly demands that each child inflict violence against themselves and their reliance on others to be free.

Against this Balthasar issues a caution, citing Jesus’ ‘terrible threat’, to those who do violence to children.³⁶

Any disturbance the child begins to sense...confuses and clouds over the horizon of absolute being and, therefore, also its bestowal of all creaturely being as a gift of God. Such a vision becomes troubled, too, because the child can grasp the gift of all existence only within the concreteness of its relationship of love with its parents within the peaceful realm of the familiar space it inhabits. *Any violence in this realm of wholeness inflicts wounds in the child’s heart which for the most part will never heal....* To say this already implies how threatened interiorly the originally wholesome world of the child is.... The feeling of being sheltered,

³¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

³² *Ibid.*, 222-223.

³³ *UBC*, 31.

³⁴ Cf., *GL5*, 617; *MTG*, 18.

³⁵ *UBC*, 12-13.

³⁶ *UBC*, 12.

which can span wide distances, is nonetheless threatened from within by a fear that a life of love could die: *this is a fear that can penetrate to the very bottom of the heart....*³⁷

Balthasar's wholesale affirmation of a child's metaphysical wonder does not, therefore, ignore the impact of wounds inflicted during childhood. It intensifies the threat. This rests on an Augustinian and Thomist account of evil as the absence of the good and diminution of being.³⁸ That the wounds against a child can be judged negatively presupposes an overarching positivity.³⁹ In irreversibly awakening to being's fullness, a child is potentially exposed to a metaphysical rejection and harm which cannot be reduced to the psychological or physiological.⁴⁰ It is because a child awakens to self-conscious freedom and being's value through love that the absence of love or the presence of evil can so threaten this freedom and damage a person's ability to encounter the concrete world around them. Hence Balthasar's reference to the depth and near-incurability of wounds inflicted to a child's heart which, as I examine later, is the concrete faculty whereby the whole person relates to being.⁴¹ As Balthasar states, any damage to the heart's *a priori* resonance to being can obscure the horizon of absolute being (God), the character of finite *esse* as divine gift and the dignity of the essential reality of beings.

Here we can address a concern Denny, echoing Rowan Williams, raises about Balthasar's failure to take seriously fallen nature in his emphasis on childhood.⁴² Balthasar, on the contrary, identifies the precise fault-line of original sin, namely, the unique relationship between a child and its parents, and

³⁷ *UBC*, 19-20. Italics added.

³⁸ For a recent defence of the Augustinian view of evil cf., David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005).

³⁹ Cf., John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (London; SCM, 2009), 141, who states that though Christianity recognises a universal tragic condition, it refuses to 'baptise it with ontological necessity.' See also, John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 149, the tragic is consequent upon the Fall, and so not inevitable, but 'contingent narrative upshot.'

⁴⁰ For a recent examination of insights drawn from development psychology and its synergy with Thomist metaphysics and Balthasar's thought see, Martin Bieler, "Attachment Theory and Aquinas's Metaphysics of Creation," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 3, (2011): 1-25.

⁴¹ Here Balthasar echoes Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. C. Garnett (New York: The Lowell Press, 1912), 355: 'You pass by a little child...with wrathful heart; you may not have noticed the child, but he has seen you, and your image, unseemly and ignoble, may remain in his defenseless heart.' Cf., *ST*, 1a.117.3, ad.2: 'when a soul is vehemently moved to wickedness..., the countenance becomes venomous and hurtful, especially to children, who have a tender and most impressionable body.' See also: *ST*, 2a.2ae.49.1. Aquinas understands this as impacting a child's imagination in corporeal terms. This leaves open its effect on the spirit. Aquinas distinguishes the imaginative memory that concerns soul's sensitive part from the habit of retention that pertains to the passive intellect (*ST*, 1a.77.8; 1a.89.6). The close relationship between the imagination and intellect in Aquinas (*ST*, Suppl.70.2) suggests a possibility of interpreting this along the same lines as Balthasar as impacting the child's spiritual being.

⁴² Denny, *A Generous Symphony*, 235. This focuses on Balthasar's positive assessment of Myskin, the main protagonist in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, whom Balthasar sees as a childlike 'holy fool.' Williams, however, sees Myskin as avoiding tragedy and incapable of adult choices. Cf., Rowan Williams, *Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2008), 48.

the tendency to redefine a child's consciousness in abstract yet deficient terms. As Balthasar says, most people 'have an experience of sin in the world rather early on, and their memory of the concrete experience of their source goes underground. The open horizon of reality becomes filled with all manner of figures that are held together by the concepts "being" and "reality", which have now become abstract. Such thinking and judging in the abstract serve them as a sign of autonomy and maturity.'⁴³ This identifies the child-parent relationship as a crucial anthropological hinge for the working of salvation in the Incarnation, something Balthasar identifies with the significance of Mary's role and more broadly those who raise children, and the importance of the sacrament of baptism.⁴⁴

This diagnosis of the potential damage to a child through a lack of love makes the interpersonal sharing of the gift of being as love vital to the metaphysical health of children and, indeed, adults. It is love that distinguishes the child from the wolf's cub.⁴⁵ Moreover, because love is fundamentally rooted in the freedom of *esse* and the heart's response to beauty, rather than mere will, it can bring healing through a new awakening to childlike wonder even in adulthood. That said, love can be deeply ambivalent because of abuses committed in its name. Here a heightened estimation of childhood may, when confronted with the suffering of children, justify a rejection of the view that being is a matter of divine love and gift. Indeed, there is a direct proportion. The greater the affirmation of the positive ontological significance of a child's perspective, the greater the horror of any abuse and the justification for rejecting being's positive nature. This can, rightly, undergird a principled refusal to support a metaphysical worldview that explains such suffering as serving a greater harmony. It may, furthermore, wrongly, justify an anti-natalist position.⁴⁶ By contrast, while Balthasar's metaphysics can recognise an aspect of truth in the anti-natalist position – the rejection of evil – it does so on the wholly positive basis of the spirit's *a priori* openness to the gift of divine *esse*. This avoids making anti-natalism's rejection of existence, or the radical doubt of modern philosophy, an absolute. Instead, it meets the finality of suffering and evil through an ever-greater openness to the gift of being, even at the price of greater, albeit redemptive, anxiety and suffering.⁴⁷

⁴³ *UBC*, 33.

⁴⁴ *UBC*, 38-40.

⁴⁵ *E*, 70

⁴⁶ The torture of children provokes Ivan Karamazov to reject God. See Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 268-296. This rejects an intra-world harmony which encompasses suffering as part of its perfection. Cf., Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 39-44, 59.

⁴⁷ Cf., Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety*, trans. Dennis D. Marti and Michael J. Miller (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000), 123-143. Balthasar affirms, with Soren Kierkegaard, the relative value of the anxiety that opens a person to being as an apparent void within and beyond themselves. Here *esse's* transcendence provides no rest because it relies on beings for subsistence. Ultimately, for Balthasar, within the context of a fallen world, anxiety is the wonder of being's excess as divine gift expressed as the 'unfelt fullness

This is not merely to defer redemption to an idealised future where all disharmony is dialectically embraced in a greater harmony. Healing can arise in the present, manifesting the redemptive nature of being like a child.⁴⁸ Furthermore, this orientation to the present means such childlikeness carries with it an urgent imperative towards justice based on openness to being's ever-greater wonder in the face of suffering.

Indeed, confronted with suffering, Balthasar insists on the importance of affirming the excessive nature of being's meaning in the midst of history in a way that heightens vulnerability to evil and suffering because it entails an ever-greater affirmation of the heart's openness to being's beauty, goodness and truth as divine gift.⁴⁹ This is a refusal to close off one's heart from suffering but rather to respond out of it.⁵⁰ As Balthasar states, 'this is a commitment to that which exists *as a whole*, no matter how it presents itself to the individual.'⁵¹ This commitment is inseparable from the *a priori* childlike act of the person's heart, but now freely affirmed by an act of the whole person as they respond to being's call in the particular. Rather than seeking a detachment from the particular and avoidance of fallen humanity in favour of an abstract idealised whole, Balthasar commends a greater openness to being as divine gift so as to arm 'the spirit against this kind of abuse of detachment and to disarm the heart so that it becomes purely receptive – even, and precisely, to pain and deprivation.'⁵²

This adult commitment to childlike wonder mirrors the task Balthasar allots to metaphysics: guardianship of being.⁵³ This is inseparable from being 'guardians of childhood.'⁵⁴ This applies to protecting both children and childlike vision. The decision to make this a personal mission comes to a head when a young person comes of age. As Balthasar says, the tenuous nature of a child's 'originally inviolable dimension can...lead to definitive breaks when a young person enters the age when he must decide for or against evil. The "supra-moral" rightness and goodness of the original

(which therefore feels like a void) of God's Totality'. Balthasar does affirm a positive sense of anxiety bestowed by God which is 'an intensification of light and of joy, a "darkness bright as day", because it is suffering *out of* joy, anxiety *out of* exultation. Ibid., 147-148.

⁴⁸ Cf., *TD5*, 187.

⁴⁹ Cf., Milbank, *Love*, 144. Milbank stresses the non-resignation to loss via an 'augmentation of the Platonic vision of good.' This 'is to *refuse* to cease to suffer, to become resigned to a loss. Only at the price of an augmentation of suffering does a complete joy and peace...shine through.' Balthasar would agree, rooting this refusal in childlike wonder at being's beauty.

⁵⁰ Cf., Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Communio—A Program," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33 (2006), 167-168.

⁵¹ *GL4*, 20.

⁵² *GL5*, 632-33.

⁵³ Cf., *GL5*, 656.

⁵⁴ D.C. Schindler, "The Unsurpassable Significance of the Child," *Humanum: Issues in Family, Culture & Science* (2011): 24.

dimension must now be affirmed with fullness of freedom.⁵⁵ Balthasar describes this according to stages that echo being's fourfold difference: first, as a movement away from the particular to *esse's* transcendence; and, then, a return to the value of the particular but with a greater desire for what is beyond the particular.⁵⁶ Child-like wonder 'must slowly move away from its all-encompassing feeling and be trained in the disciplined contemplation of the Being of existents.'⁵⁷ Indeed, what distinguishes childhood and adulthood, for Balthasar, is the notion of election (*electio*): 'the election of a definite path, state, or vocation in life...marks the passage from the unlimited, universal possibility of childhood to the wise limitation imposed by the adult's dedication to the one thing needful.'⁵⁸ What is key is not simply choosing a path, but an 'integration of the "supra-moral", holy treasures of our original condition into the time of our maturity...'⁵⁹ Such 'an adult, who has...recovered at a higher level the concrete spontaneity of the child, is called by Novalis "the synthetic child".'⁶⁰

Balthasar identifies the 'essential traits' of such a synthetic child who lives a 'childhood in God as an adult.'⁶¹ First, it involves an attitude of abiding wonder at the beauty of things and that 'all of this *is*', and at God as 'the ever greater one'.⁶² This is a person fully alive to the phenomenon of being's primal *Gestalt*. Secondly, such wonder engenders 'elemental thanksgiving.'⁶³ This is expressed concretely, in the first place, via gratitude to one's parents and God as the source of the gift of being. Thirdly, it entails participation in the 'intimate character of the Church as mystery' and the readiness to receive the grace of the sacraments, the proclamation of the Word and the authority of the Church, which, more broadly, emphasise a disposition of obedience appropriate to how a person's freedom is received from and shared with others and God. Fourthly, it entails an attitude of taking time and receiving the fullness of the gift of the present moment where 'all of time is gathered up, effortlessly as it were' and which 'contains the memory of already having received as much as the hope of receiving time now'. Here every moment unveils 'the very ground of time: as if it reposed on

⁵⁵ *UBC*, 13.

⁵⁶ Cf., Balthasar, *Anxiety*, 129-130.

⁵⁷ *GL1*, 179.

⁵⁸ *ExT5*, 212.

⁵⁹ *UBC*, 13-14.

⁶⁰ *UBC*, 14. In *ExT5*, 206, Balthasar cites Augustine's commentary on the Psalms to the same effect: "'Let your old age be as that of a boy, and let your boyhood be as that of an old man." [Psalm 112.2]... "In moving forward, let us not cease to be new or become old instead. Let us grow, rather, in our very newness." [Psalm 131.1]' For Augustine, see *Exposition of the Psalms* 99-120, Volume 4 and *Exposition of the Psalms* 121-150, Volume 5, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2004).

⁶¹ *UBC*, 44.

⁶² *UBC*, 47.

⁶³ *UBC*, 47.

eternity itself.⁶⁴ For Balthasar, the latter is particularly evidenced in a propensity for play and sleep: 'Play is possible only within time so conceived, and also the unresisting welcome we give to sleep....'⁶⁵

Becoming a synthetic child and integrating childlikeness with adult responsibility are flush with Balthasar's entire metaphysical vision of human self-consciousness' concrete openness to being in wonder. Conversely, this accentuates the tragic nature of those whose hearts have been scarred as children, and are unable to effect this integration. But then, in another reversal, because of the value Balthasar attaches to the whole of being appearing in the particular as gift, and the heart's *a priori* receptivity to being's fullness, this maintains the possibility of a healing of the tragic through the gesture of another's heartfelt engagement wherein God's loving gift of being is mediated anew.⁶⁶ This rekindles the metaphysical memory of the original wholeness attendant upon the child's awakening in wonder. Balthasar here echoes Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In *The Brothers Karamozov's* closing chapter, the character Alyosha tells a group of children:

[T]here is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe to the end of his days, and if one has only one good memory left in one's heart, even that may sometime be the means of saving us....⁶⁷

A good childhood memory keeps a person's heart pliable to *esse* as gift. It is significant, moreover, that, in the passage above, it is an adult telling this to children in a parental-like capacity.⁶⁸ Balthasar's perspective links such memories to the first memory of being's primal *Gestalt* whereby a child is awoken to self-conscious existence through a concrete encounter of the heart.⁶⁹ This rests on the receipt of the concrete *Gestalt* of its mother's love which awakens and shapes the child's heart and its whole spiritual nature from beyond itself, wherein resides the capacity for memory and the wellspring of action, knowledge and language. As he says,

⁶⁴ *UBC*, 51.

⁶⁵ *UBC*, 51.

⁶⁶ This is offered most fully through the grace of baptism. See *UBC*, 39, 42.

⁶⁷ Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamozov*, 875-876.

⁶⁸ Cf., John Milbank, "Fictioning Things: Gift and Narrative," *Religion & Literature* 37.3, (2005): 8-9, since 'children first learn through pictures and stories, the selection of the right stories told the right way becomes *the most central concern....*' Milbank talks here of adults who know how 'to qualify egoistic self-consciousness with a childishly active but unselfconscious participation in the real.' Balthasar emphasises how this has its origins in the awakening of self-consciousness by parental love.

⁶⁹ Cf., *UBC*, 25. Balthasar calls this 'a fragment of archetypical childhood.'

[t]he mother's smile is not a spoken word, yet it is understood as one because it is an expression of spirit. It is "word" as image, which received within the child's heart, is engraved on the imagination [*ein-gebildet*] and, as an internal image [*In-bild*], is interpreted as referring to the imaginal structure [*Gebilde*] in its self-expression. Later, when the child learns to order similar images in accord with their objective interrelations [*Zusammengehörigkeit*], this "word" can be grasped, translated into concepts that contain ever more of the world.⁷⁰

The concrete image of its mother's loving self-expression shapes the child's imaginative heart thereby underpinning every subsequent self-conscious act. To understand this further, I propose now to explore Balthasar's understanding of human self-consciousness and, particularly, the centrality he accords the heart as the faculty of the everlasting child.

2. Ontological Freedom of the Self-Conscious Human Person

Balthasar explores the ontological nature of the freedom of human self-consciousness at several points in the trilogy and elsewhere. His thinking develops from the earliest book, *TL1*. Although there is much continuity, Balthasar's position shifts notably regarding the relationship between self-consciousness and being. He moves from an essentially modern philosophical perspective of consciousness, as a pre-existing abstract reality that is the preserve of the subject and only secondarily related to the empirically-encountered objects of consciousness, to a perspective that, while affirming an *a priori* relationship between finite consciousness and finite being, also holds this pre-existent ontological relationship as, paradoxically, awoken in the concrete encounter between child and parents. Balthasar affirms in the *Epilogue*: 'man is open for the world in its entirety; his self-consciousness is indissolubly linked with his world-consciousness – so much so that he attains to self-consciousness only as he is addressed by and from the world.'⁷¹

In what follows, I expand on this, delineating three distinct, mutually illuminating aspects. First, I offer a more formal account of the freedom of self-consciousness as rooted in each person's participation in the letting be of *esse* via their human nature.⁷² This formal view, however, is always inflected by the concrete context of the child's awakening by another. Secondly, I explore how this concrete perspective means that self-consciousness can never be reduced to an abstract isolated act of the subject. It is a dramatic event of encounter between the object and subject of consciousness,

⁷⁰ *TL2*, 256.

⁷¹ *E*, 47-48.

⁷² Affirming the concrete does not exclude an examination in the 'abstract and ideal sphere....' *TD2*, 285.

one which engages the whole subject according to a complex interaction of its various faculties. Thirdly, I relate this to Balthasar's understanding of the heart's attunement to being. I then consider further the concrete content of the child-adult encounter.

In *TD2* and *TD3* Balthasar considers the relationship between a person's self-consciousness and *esse* in light of its genesis in the encounter between child and parent. From this we can identify seven elements of Balthasar's understanding of the ontological nature of human self-conscious freedom.

2.1. Self-consciousness as ontological freedom rooted in esse

First, in *TD2*, Balthasar explores the formal relationship between self-consciousness and being from the perspective of 'the fundamental "*cogito-sum*,"' drawing on the thought of Augustine, Aquinas and Descartes.⁷³ The *cogito-sum*, or sense of 'I am', refers to the essential act of a person's intellectual/spiritual nature and its participation in *esse*.⁷⁴ While intellectual, it is more than intellectual as it concerns the act of the whole person. It goes beyond the intellectual awareness of individual items that appear to consciousness, including the awareness 'I am thinking'. Rather, it concerns, in Aquinas' terms, a habitual knowledge of self; what Balthasar refers to as active 'self-possession'.⁷⁵ Thus, "even before the soul performs some abstraction, it has a habitual (self-possessing) knowledge where it can understand that it exists", and this is because the soul's essence is present to itself, so that it knows itself "in a certain sense through its essence, as God knows himself".⁷⁶ While this intellectual self-possession is habitual as the act of the subject's whole intellectual nature participating in *esse*, it is ontologically prior to habitual knowledge.⁷⁷ Hence such

⁷³ *TD2*, 207.

⁷⁴ Balthasar locates the *cogito-sum vis-à-vis creatio ex nihilo*. Against Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), Balthasar affirms *cogitor ergo sum* (I am thought therefore I am). Cf., *E*, 81; *TL1*, 54.

⁷⁵ *TD2*, 208.

⁷⁶ *TD2*, 207-208. References to *De Veritate*, 10.8.

⁷⁷ At *TD2*, 207-208n.2, Balthasar clarifies this vis-à-vis tensions between Thomist and Augustinian traditions. Thus, 'Thomas reduces actual knowledge to habitual, which is only actualized indirectly, through its powers, which are distinct from the soul's essence and are referred to objects.... [For the] Augustine school...the reflexive character of all intellectual knowledge involves the knower possessing himself....' Balthasar holds this opposition resolves in Aquinas' notion of the intellectual nature's participation in the divine light. Although, for Balthasar, this is always mediated via participation in *esse*. This resolution also applies to the notion of habit which is a participation in divine gift. Cf., John Milbank, "What Lacks is Feeling: Hume versus Kant and Habermas," in *Faithful Reading New Essays in Theology and Philosophy in Honour of Fergus Kerr*, ed. Simon Oliver and Karen Kilby (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 17-19. For Balthasar, it is only because a child is awoken by another's gift of being that it awakens to the gift of habitual self-knowledge.

self-possession is ‘not a particular accidental form of conduct (for this presupposes that the subject already exists), but the constitution of the subject-“substance” itself.’⁷⁸

As this suggests, the primal self-possession of the *cogito–sum* is, for Balthasar, inseparable from the possession of being itself. ‘I know not only that I exist but in the same knowledge I am open to all being, since in this consciousness, that I *am*, I have touched the farthest possible horizon, beyond which, evidently, there can be nothing more.’⁷⁹ This is the ‘primal act of self-knowledge (which is a knowledge of being)’ where ‘in grasping our own being, we also grasp all being whatsoever, which goes beyond all particular beings. (This takes place in the soul’s innermost – and self-evident – presence to itself.)’⁸⁰ More fully, the origin of this ontological self-possession and self-illumination ‘comes from the very ground of Being, which we cannot “get behind” and which the questioning mind cannot approach, as it were, from the outside (because it is part of it).... Spiritual being is one form, a highest form, of participation in Being.’⁸¹ The intellectual light whereby we know and possess ourselves is the light of both spirit and being. This participation in the light of *esse* discloses consciousness to itself and ‘the first principles’ of all being.⁸² Moreover, ‘[c]orresponding to the nature of being – which is both true and good – this “light”, like everything else we shall have to say about freedom, is an indivisibly intellectual and volitive light....’⁸³ Here we touch on how Balthasar correlates self-conscious freedom to the different spiritual faculties of human nature and their source in being according to transcendental aspects of goodness, truth and beauty. I examine this in chapter four.

My present concern, however, is the formal relationship between self-consciousness and *esse*. The simultaneity of *esse* and the awareness of being present-to-myself unveils, what Balthasar calls, a fundamental paradox between ‘the absolute incommunicability of my own being (as “I”) and the unlimited communicability of being as such....’⁸⁴ These are not extrinsically related. Rather, ‘it is precisely in the experience of being “I” (and no one else) that I pass beyond all limiting knowledge of my nature and touch being (reality) in its uniqueness. The one, identical experience of being discloses two things simultaneously: the utter incommunicability (or uniqueness) and the equally

⁷⁸ *MTG*, 45. Cf., *MTG*, 39: ‘the human spirit [is] active all the time (*intellectus semper agens*), even when this activity makes itself known as actual knowledge (in the *intellectus passibilis*) only when it is addressed by the world.’

⁷⁹ *TD2*, 208.

⁸⁰ *TD2*, 239.

⁸¹ *TD2*, 240.

⁸² *TD2*, 209.

⁸³ *TD2*, 211.

⁸⁴ *TD2*, 208.

total communicability of being.⁸⁵ This concurrence of the incommunicability and communicability of *esse* as it subsists as 'I am' constitutes, for Balthasar, the ontological basis of self-possessive human freedom. The latter is not primarily an act whereby the subject grasps or gains intuition into itself. Rather, the unique freedom of each I 'articulates itself only *in* and *with* the universal opening to all being, leaving itself behind to embrace the knowledge and will of others and other things, particularly in shared being [*Mitsein*], whereby the original opening is always so great that no individual being...can fill it.'⁸⁶ This openness establishes an ontological freedom as the basis of self-consciousness that is prior to and underpins the acts of our distinct faculties and capacity to affirm or reject other beings.

2.2. Nature and person

Balthasar expands this ontological understanding of self-possessive freedom in light of the theological and philosophical distinction between being a person and an individual human. First, a point of clarification is needed. In Balthasar's usage, 'person' applies predominantly to how someone receives, by virtue of a gift of supernatural grace, a unique mission from God within the body of Christ as a share in Christ's mission.⁸⁷ When someone 'freely affirms and accepts the...mission which God, in sovereign freedom, offers him, he has the greatest possible chance of becoming a person, of laying hold of his own substance, of grasping that most intimate idea of his own self...'⁸⁸ This makes a 'theological person.'⁸⁹

Balthasar also recognises that 'person' can be used, if not supernaturally, then in a 'natural' sense for how spiritual nature opens beyond nature in a 'hypercosmic' way to the divine gift of *esse*.⁹⁰ Balthasar thus distinguishes 'two forms or grades of personhood.' In the natural case, the openness of spirit to *esse* does not of itself bestow an identity tied to a divinely-bestowed personal mission. Nevertheless, it points 'to that solidarity and coresponsibility for the whole' that arises from how each person 'possesses complete human nature, [and] has access through love and understanding to all that is thought and felt, done and suffered by other subjects possessing the same nature...'⁹¹ This 'is perfected at the "supernatural" level, where human freedom...is challenged to make an ultimate

⁸⁵ TD2, 208.

⁸⁶ TD2, 211.

⁸⁷ TD2, 402-403, TD3, 263-282; 456-461.

⁸⁸ TD3, 263.

⁸⁹ Cf., Marc Ouellet, *L'existence comme mission: L'anthropologie théologique de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1983).

⁹⁰ TD2, 402.

⁹¹ TD3, 272.

act of faith in absolute freedom and love.⁹² The latter fulfils but also presupposes the former. For this thesis, I am concerned with natural personhood.

As Balthasar notes, while nature and personhood are inseparable insofar as every human person is an individual that belongs to a species possessing an embodied spiritual nature, person and nature are irreducible. Hence, the personal act of self-consciousness as open to *esse* is not concerned simply with *what* I am, but simultaneously with *that* and *how* I am and that I exist as a *who*, as a unique person, who by virtue of *what* I am, namely, embodied spirit, can know myself, others and being in its fullness and uniqueness. Personhood thus involves a particular way or ‘mode of being’ that pertains to being a spirit which is distinct yet inseparable from the spirit’s openness to being as a whole.⁹³ While humans are not only persons but individuals with a common nature, their self-possessive freedom means no-one is simply an individual alongside a ‘endlessly multipliable’ number of others but uniquely possesses that nature as their own – an experience which Balthasar locates not in essence or nature, but in a way of being, ‘in existence as such.’⁹⁴

The uniqueness of a person’s ‘I am’ is what it means for spirit to encompass *esse* within itself. While rooted in human embodied spiritual nature, a person’s unique openness to *esse* transcends nature, and so is beyond yet inseparable from nature.⁹⁵ This inseparability means the trans-essential nature of a person is not identical with *esse*. As Balthasar explains: ‘no worldly entity 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. That is why the freest entity *lives out* its essence in itself...but is *grounded* not in itself, but in what is trans-essential, in Being absolutely....’⁹⁶ The consequence is that personhood must be seen from two complementary perspectives: first, from the perspective of the existing nature which a person “‘has” and which is specified by various delimiting qualities; and, secondly, from the standpoint of the mode of being of this very nature that is rooted in the actuality of *esse* itself; that is, in ‘the act of coming to possess

⁹² TD3, 459-460.

⁹³ TD2, 209.

⁹⁴ TD2, 209.

⁹⁵ As Michael Hanby, *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) 305, clarifies: ‘The notion of the person...represents a certain primacy of the subject of a nature over the nature itself, a primacy which nevertheless protects the “the rights of nature” in its very distinction from its bearer.’ Cf., Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus Confessor*, trans. B.E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 211; and, “On the Concept of Person,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 13, (1986): 18-26. On the nature-person distinction, see Joseph. C. Ratzinger “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 17, (1990): 439–454; and, Robert Spaemann, *Persons: the Difference Between ‘Someone’ and ‘Something’*, trans. Oliver O’Donovan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006).

⁹⁶ E, 49.

this nature⁹⁷ The uniqueness of each person, moreover, precisely because it arises from the uniqueness and ubiquity of *esse*, coincides with an openness towards all others who also uniquely share in *esse* according to the same spiritual nature. This emphasises how being a person possessed of spiritual nature is inseparable from other persons.

2.3. *The birth of self-consciousness*

This leads to a third formal aspect which, however, is patently coloured by the concrete. Each person only awakens to the personal reality of self-consciousness as an embodied spirit open to *esse* as a child dependent on its parents. The 'little child awakens to self-consciousness through being addressed by the love of his mother.'⁹⁸ This is an event of encounter wherein 'the intellectual spark bursts into flame' in the child's 'innermost core'.⁹⁹ This is the 'primal act of spiritual life': 'everything begins with the child's being addressed by a Thou'; embedded in this 'is the awareness that being a self is inseparable from owing oneself to another.'¹⁰⁰ Schindler names this the 'birth of consciousness,' adopting a phrase from *TL2*.¹⁰¹ This means that 'each free, human self-awareness enters the dance at a particular time. But it cannot enter by its own volition: it cannot waken itself to free self-awareness (otherwise it would have eternally to precede itself); it can only be wakened to free self-awareness by some other free self-awareness...'¹⁰² Although as embodied spirit the child is active from the moment *esse* attains subsistence within it, it is not fully awoken as spirit because it depends on receiving itself from another.

Balthasar offers this as a concretely interpersonal rendering of Aquinas' notion of *reditio completa* where a person grasps their unique self-consciousness, and so *esse*, by having gone wholly out from and receiving themselves back again – 'the total taking possession of itself in the total transcending of itself to a "Thou" that is recognized as the other who loves.'¹⁰³ Balthasar affirms against Aquinas, however, 'an elementary truth of human nature: unless a child is awakened to I-consciousness through the instrumentality of a Thou, it cannot become a human child at all.'¹⁰⁴ Balthasar thus makes the reciprocal nature of human consciousness a basic anthropological principle that underpins all subsequent development of self-consciousness.

⁹⁷ Balthasar, *Maximus*, 225.

⁹⁸ *MTG*, 15.

⁹⁹ *MTG*, 43.

¹⁰⁰ *TD3*, 457.

¹⁰¹ *DST*, 110. See, *TL2*, 254.

¹⁰² *TD2*, 388-389.

¹⁰³ *MTG*, 17. Cf., Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, 98-102.

¹⁰⁴ *TD3*, 175. Balthasar critiques Aquinas' claim that Christ did not need to learn from others. See, *ST*, 3a.12.3. As Balthasar says, *TD3*, 175-176, 'Thomas's proposition is at odds with the logic of the Incarnation.'

Positively, this event of birth means the child attains its sense of I am 'by being raised up *by* the other, *to* the other.'¹⁰⁵ This is an ecstatic movement which, while constituting the subject in themselves, occurs only through the prior invitation of the other. By its birth-like awakening, therefore, self-consciousness is established as inherently ecstatic and dependent for its own self-possession on being hospitable to concrete difference. As Balthasar expands, '[t]his descent of the intellect to conscious self-possession is an act of simple fullness that can only *in abstracto* be analysed into various aspects and phases. It is not in the least possible to make it comprehensible on the basis of the formal "structure" of the intellect.'¹⁰⁶ The structure of self-consciousness is not, therefore, imposed upon a pre-existing subjectivity which is then constrained to act within it. Rather, the self-conscious subject receives itself along with its concrete limits from beyond. These 'limits again and again bring to fulfilment what reason is in its most profound and original form: a generously appropriating encounter with its other....'¹⁰⁷

This can be contrasted with ways of understanding consciousness that are inimical to the abiding value of childhood. First, Balthasar implicitly cautions against trying abstractly, along Kantian lines, to identify *a priori* limits of self-consciousness prior to its engagement with being's concrete appearance.¹⁰⁸ For Kant, it is crucial for self-conscious freedom that it is the source of its own autonomy and limits, and not swayed by heteronomous influences.¹⁰⁹ This is affirmed and enacted, moreover, by a pure free will. The problem here is that self-consciousness relates to objects only extrinsically where this interaction is determined beforehand by abstract limits which are imposed on external objects. This precludes any intrinsic link between the freedom of self-consciousness and the relationships which foster a person into existence. It jettisons in advance the value of a child's self-consciousness.

Secondly, Balthasar's view means a child does not awaken to a fully formed self-contained consciousness. If this were so the child would, incongruously, already possess its full self-conscious identity, yet in a weakened state. This raises difficulties about how the child relates to adults. In its utter dependence, the child's self-conscious identity would be subsumed by theirs. It establishes an inverse proportionality where the more adults relate to the child, the more the child's self-consciousness is absorbed into theirs and the child's distinctiveness diminished. This articulates a

¹⁰⁵ *DST*, 112.

¹⁰⁶ *MTG*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ D.C. Schindler, "'Wie Kommt Der Mensch In Die Theologie?': Heidegger, Hegel, And The Stakes Of Onto-Theo-Logy," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32, (2005): 665-666.

¹⁰⁸ *MTG*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A1-2/B1-3.

fundamentally antagonistic relationship between adult and child consciousness. Moreover, the child is encouraged to reject the dependence of childhood in order to fully possess its self-conscious freedom.

Thirdly, the birth of consciousness can be distinguished from a mere emergence from the child's spiritual nature. As Balthasar states, 'in the mysterious birth of self-consciousness, which does not primarily "arise"; rather, it "awakens" to itself in the capacity to interpret an appearing image as the call of a Thou.'¹¹⁰ It is noteworthy, however, that in the earlier *TL1*, Balthasar does present it thus. 'There is nothing gentler or more continuous than this emergence of man's spirit out of the realm of unconscious nature....'¹¹¹ This articulates a subtle yet fundamental difference to Balthasar's later view. In *TL1*, he describes the child's awakening to self-consciousness as the natural outworking of the subject's spontaneous power in the subject-object encounter. Full self-conscious freedom arises via the subject's growing self-appropriation through its interaction with and sublimation of the objective world. The dynamism that forms the basis of the mature fully formed self-consciousness here already resides in a self-contained, albeit, immature and indeterminate subjectivity. Self-consciousness does not, therefore, awake by being called to itself from beyond itself.

In this Balthasar is close to Hegel.¹¹² On one level, Hegel affirms an immediate relationship between subjectivity and being in childhood that abides into adulthood. However, the immediate relationship between them is formal and indeterminate. The child's relatively empty being and indeterminate subjectivity must go through a self-actualising process of becoming, mediated by the concrete encounter between the subject and object wherein the subject both actively and receptively takes objects into itself and transcend them by becoming fully self-determining. This enriches being via a dialectical process of becoming self-conscious as the spiritual subject. Here the child's subjective existence must be overcome to attain full self-conscious adult existence. Hegel's position can only find abiding value in childhood insofar as it supplies the basic self-contained atom of being a subject as the precondition for fully autonomous adulthood as an expression of absolute Spirit in the world. This denies any inherent and lasting richness to the state of childhood. Furthermore, it has no place for an enduring positive relationship between child and parents for the subject's growth means appropriating previously non-mediated external sources of authority into its self-conscious freedom. That Balthasar abandons this perspective shows the influence of Ulrich. The latter affirms Hegel's insight that childhood is a unity of being and nothing, while reinterpreting this along Thomist lines as

¹¹⁰ *TL2*, 254.

¹¹¹ *TL1*, 162-163.

¹¹² See, e.g., Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 7-23; and *The Science of Logic*, 83-125, 463.

esse's fullness which in poverty gives itself away in love.¹¹³ This richness-in-poverty reflects the enduring significance of being childlike as described in the previous chapter's discussion of being's fullness and poverty. As Balthasar says in his later thought, what the Hegelian approach lacks in its immediate relationship between empty being and an already fully constituted, albeit indeterminate, self-consciousness is an inherent sense of being's self-exceeding fruitfulness.¹¹⁴

Finally, Balthasar's starting point also differs from a Thomist and Husserl-based phenomenological notion of consciousness. As Schindler notes, Balthasar shares with these perspectives that self-consciousness does not precede but rather arises simultaneously with consciousness of the other which also participates in the reality of consciousness but cannot be reduced to the subject. What distinguishes them, however, is that whereas a Thomist or phenomenological perspective 'tends to begin "abstractly" with the already mature mind, involved in the world and finding itself reflected back to itself therein, Balthasar begins concretely with the *real* beginning, the child's coming to himself, which is the *original* experience that *grounds* the possibility of being always already involved in the world.'¹¹⁵ The former view prescind from the personal origin of consciousness. The structures of consciousness are posited fully formed. As Schindler notes, if 'we were to begin "in the middle," like traditional approaches to consciousness...outside of the event of gift, we are forced to *oppose* mediacy and immediacy, spontaneity and receptivity, and so cannot avoid eventually falling into a flat, or linear, epistemology.'¹¹⁶ This echoes the difficulties above about how a child relates to adults in a way that affirms their difference and unity, avoiding violence to the child's perspective. Schindler also draws a comparison between Balthasar's notion of the birth of consciousness and Heidegger's notion of being thrown [*geworfen*] which offers a historical account of the beginning of self-consciousness.¹¹⁷ Unlike Heidegger's impersonal beginning, for Balthasar, this is a personal event which is not foremost 'a "being thrown" but a "being welcomed," a "being-permitted-to-be."¹¹⁸

2.4. Freedom rooted in ontological dependency

The notion that self-conscious freedom is born makes its structure dependent on the prior reality and activity of another self-conscious person's love through whom *esse* is mediated. Balthasar calls

¹¹³ See Ulrich, *Kindheit*, 25-36 on Hegel, and, *ibid.*, 47-111, on the unity of poverty and wealth as characterising childhood.

¹¹⁴ See *TL3*, 38-41. Cf., *DST*, 120n.74.

¹¹⁵ *DST*, 113-114.

¹¹⁶ *DST*, 114-115.

¹¹⁷ Cf., *MTG*, 20.

¹¹⁸ *DST*, 114.

this 'ontological indebtedness.'¹¹⁹ This does not mean the child's self-consciousness is created out of nothing. The adult 'does not endow the "I" with subsistent being but enables it to lay hold of the totality of Being in which it has been given a share.'¹²⁰ This event of awakening, therefore, does not equate with or supplant the first gift of *esse* at conception but intensifies the latter via another personal mediation of *esse* that actualises the child's full capacity as embodied spirit. Now, for the first time, albeit in fledging fashion, the child can encompass being fully within itself which opens the child ecstatically to others and allows it to mediate *esse* freely as gift.

Within Balthasar's understanding of being's fourfold difference, this ontological indebtedness at the heart of freedom extends beyond the purely human relational world to the relation of finite being to God. Every 'human being who is awakened to freedom owes his existence ultimately to an infinite freedom [...which...] is communicative....'¹²¹ The freedom of the human person is neither self-grounding, nor simply caused by interpersonal encounter. Though a child is first given their freedom by others, who mediate *esse* to it, this is rooted in infinite divine freedom. As Balthasar explains,

'[a]t this birth, in a certain sense, an umbilical cord is cut; finite freedom now exists "in itself" (it has an "essence", a "nature") and may not be defined simply in terms of relation to infinite freedom. On the other side, the "gift of freedom" remains a gift; ...the more seriously finite freedom appreciates that it is a gift to itself..., the more it will be full of thanksgiving as it takes control of itself....'¹²²

The reference here to an infinite communicative gift of divine freedom refers each person back to that which, ontologically-speaking, is communicated first, namely, divine *esse*. As Balthasar says, 'at the most fundamental level, the dawn of self-awareness *in freedom* is not the realization that we are simply "there", even "there with others," it is rooted in the fact that we are "gift" and "gifted" which presupposes a "giving" reality.'¹²³ This in turn establishes the pattern of being a self-dependent-on-gift, which is one with being childlike: '[i]t is by embracing and keeping the gift of being, by exercising the privilege of being, that I am freely myself.... [I]n my *cogito/sum*, therefore, I never cease recalling these things and giving thanks....'¹²⁴ While not everyone may experience this, it follows ontologically from their being a child of others and characterises an adult appropriation of childlikeness.

¹¹⁹ *TD3*, 457.

¹²⁰ *TD3*, 458-459n.6.

¹²¹ *TD3*, 458.

¹²² *TD2*, 312.

¹²³ *TD2*, 391. Cf., *TD2*, 389.

¹²⁴ *TD2*, 391.

The communicative aspect of God's *esse* is, moreover, handed over to and communicated through acts shared in concrete community. Hence, for Balthasar, the divine provenance of human freedom, and the latter's inherent dependence on others in the child's awakening, stress the divine origin of humanity community. As Balthasar affirms, 'free self-awareness experiences itself as an "I" only when it knows that it is addressed and treated as a "thou"...that is, when it realizes that it is admitted into the appropriate community.'¹²⁵ That said, what ultimately decides the appropriateness of the human community is whether its divine provenance is acknowledged so that each child is welcomed not merely as one among a collection of individuals sharing the same nature, but as a unique person in a community wherein the child discovers their personal reality and purpose in openness to the divine gift of *esse*.

2.5. Freedom as ontological gift given for and with others

The ontological indebtedness that pervades the self-conscious freedom of the human person in its openness to *esse* cannot be divorced from how this freedom is not only constituted by others but depends on affirming others' freedom in their participation in *esse*. '[I]t is an integral part of this imperishable freedom...that the soul, precisely because it possesses itself in freedom, necessarily respects all other beings on account of their freedom (they are true and real) and *lets them be*...'¹²⁶ This reiterates how each person's freedom, their *I am*, includes and requires interpersonal human community. 'Precisely because being-in-its totality has disclosed itself to him [the child], and he has experienced the gift-quality of his own nature and hence his relativity, his "response-character"...and so the limitation of his nature, the individual subject realizes that he is "for-himself-with-others".'¹²⁷ The latter, however, can only be expressed through an act of free communication. This not only requires that the other's freedom be freely acknowledged 'but also the freedom to detach oneself from the totality of the world (and hence from the community) and encounter the latter creatively, out of the uniqueness of one's own self. In this way, beings existing for themselves simultaneously exist for one another.'¹²⁸

¹²⁵ *TD2*, 389.

¹²⁶ *TD2*, 239-240.

¹²⁷ *TD2*, 388-390.

¹²⁸ *TD2*, 388.

2.6. Gift implies a task

This sense that each person's self-conscious freedom is constituted by the gift of *esse* that is received from others and shared with and for others, means that freedom is oriented towards a particular task – 'the gift implies a task.'¹²⁹ Balthasar here distinguishes between two distinct but inseparable pillars of human freedom: first, self-possession through a person's openness to being as embodied spirit, and, secondly, how this self-possession and ontological openness are freely exercised and shared with others. While the

first pillar of freedom is unequivocally "given"; the second is both "given" [*gegeben*] and "laid upon us" [*aufgegeben*]. We are given the necessity (this is our "thrown-ness", *Geworfenheit*) of going out from ourselves in order to make decisions and prove ourselves in the environment of our fellow men and fellow things. The manner and degree of our "self-realization" remain open, and it is up to man himself to decide what, ultimately, constitutes freedom and under what form it should be striven for.¹³⁰

Balthasar expands on this. The given-ness and self-realising task of the subject's finite freedom are bestowed by an 'infinite freedom' that each person is 'profoundly involved with', whether willingly or not, and, it is in light of this infinite freedom that each person must choose their 'own "idea".'¹³¹ This concerns what Balthasar calls a 'life-form [*Gestalt*]' with which a person identifies themselves. What is crucial is whether the life-form chosen expresses being's primal form within concrete interpersonal relationships that underpin the concrete definition and freedom of each person's self-conscious existence. To be true, a life-form is not imposed randomly from the outside but 'bestowed from within and...freely chosen...[and] uniquely personal....'¹³²

2.7. Natural desire for the vision of God

Balthasar considers the different elements of self-consciousness enumerated above to 'form the core of an ontology of finite freedom.'¹³³ To this he adds another aspect, namely, Augustine and Aquinas' understanding of the natural desire for God (*desiderium natural visionis Dei*), particularly as rearticulated by Henri de Lubac.¹³⁴ This is implicit in how a spiritual being, by nature, points beyond

¹²⁹ TD3, 458.

¹³⁰ TD2, 212-213.

¹³¹ TD2, 285. Cf. TD2, 302-303.

¹³² GL1, 23-24.

¹³³ TD3, 458.

¹³⁴ TD3, 416-417. Cf., Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), 484; and, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 55, 68-69, 183, 217.

itself and nature to *esse* and, therefore, to God as self-subsistent *esse* and source of finite being. More explicitly, this affirms that humans are created by grace with the natural desire for grace that can be fulfilled, however, only by the unexpected gift of grace. Here Balthasar affirms, with de Lubac, that human 'nature de facto has only one, single, supernatural end.'¹³⁵ Hence, there is no pure self-contained nature (*natura pura*), only en-graced (and healed) nature or nature fallen from grace. As Balthasar states, '[m]an's nature, actuating itself as spirit, is essentially a search, a setting-out, for the absolute, the prototype; and in virtue of its own freedom, the spirit knows that the absolute can only encounter it in complete freedom.'¹³⁶ It is this ontological freedom rooted in the desire of the whole person for God which underpins the transcendent orientation of encounters between humans in their mutual freedom and dependence.¹³⁷ On one level, the natural desire for God, while it has its source from and fulfilment in God, is played out in the mutual awakening and indebtedness between actual persons. Nevertheless, these are truly fulfilled not in themselves, in a purely immanent transcendence, but beyond themselves and all things in God. These horizontal and vertical aspects of the human desire for God intersect. They do so, moreover, primordially in the child's first self-conscious activity as free spirit awoken by its parents.

3. Complex Nature of Human Self-Consciousness

The previous section considered Balthasar's treatment of the ontological nature of human self-conscious freedom more formally. Given the genesis of each person's self-consciousness as a child, however, this formal perspective is inseparable from the concrete encounter between the subject and object of consciousness. I examine this now by considering Balthasar's account of the complex nature of human self-consciousness based on the interaction of the spiritual faculties of the intellect, will and heart. Though distinct, they are also interdependent and cohere into a single complex act of the same person who acts through them. They are, moreover, ontological because they concern how each person participates in *esse* according to their embodied spiritual nature.

In understanding how the intellect and will interact with each other and the objects of self-consciousness, Balthasar draws on Aristotelian and Thomist thought.¹³⁸ Here, *prima facie*, the intellect relates to the being and essential reality of objects such that the object is actively taken intellectually into the subject where this is not merely a mental event but a real relationship that mediates *esse*. The intellect is primarily receptive. Conversely, the will relates to the being and

¹³⁵ Balthasar, *Barth*, 287.

¹³⁶ *TD3*, 416.

¹³⁷ *TD3*, 458-459.

¹³⁸ Cf., *TL1*, 35-78.

essential reality of objects such that the subject moves towards the object where this again effects a real relationship between them. The will here is primarily active. A crucial question within Thomist tradition is how the respective movements of intellect (from object to subject), and will (from subject to object) are related to each other given they are acts of the same person who is also dependent on the reality of objects in their joint participation in *esse*. I approach this in light of Balthasar's focus on the interdependence of the intellect and will as pertaining to the whole spiritual subject in its encounter with objects.

As already noted, the intellect, understood as an act of the subject's whole intellectual nature, is open to the light of *esse* beyond all beings and yet only grasps *esse* in the encounter with other beings. Balthasar calls this dual unity of the thinking subject, in terms reworked from Kant, 'the unity of apperception.'¹³⁹ This has a vertical and horizontal aspect. The vertical echoes the Kantian *a priori* transcendental condition of the possibility of knowledge. However, Balthasar interprets this in non-Kantian terms as the intellect's participation in *esse*. This recalls Balthasar's view of the fundamental experience of the *cogito/sum* described above. He affirms the unity of the intellectual subject as 'a definite being capable of comprehending itself and thereby also (potentially) all other beings...'¹⁴⁰ Also contra Kant, this *a priori* vertical ontological condition is inseparable from an horizontal aspect: its simultaneous dependence on the concrete relationship to the unity of the object's being. This involves a horizontal sense of transcendence since the object is wholly distinct from the subject and gives itself to be known in its distinctiveness. It ensures the abstract unity of the vertical aspect of the intellect is rooted in the concrete unity of the horizontal that includes within it an inherent dependence on difference.

The jointly vertical and horizontal dynamic of each person's intellectual unity of apperception is important philosophically and cognitively. As Balthasar states in *TL1*, the 'unity of consciousness in its immediate relation to being is what makes possible the grasping of an object as an existing object.'¹⁴¹ It is by virtue of this concrete unity of being and thinking, which is fully awoken in a child by its parents, that each person can recognise the ontological unity of other beings as they appear as objects of consciousness. In the *Epilogue*, Balthasar expands:

this act of taking in the appearance of the other can only occur for me when I can gather up the variety of his manifold ways of appearing – voice, colors, movements – into the "unity of

¹³⁹ *E*, 52.

¹⁴⁰ *E*, 49.

¹⁴¹ *TL1*, 133-136.

my apperception". I must "apperceive" the reality of the being encountering me. He is a reality I am thus able to recognize on the basis of my own reality.¹⁴²

This passage articulates how the ontological reality of the unity of apperception (the act of intellect and being) of the subject is the transcendental condition of the possibility of knowing another as a unified and really existing essential whole.¹⁴³ While this cannot take place without the prior activity of the senses and imagination, Balthasar states that the unity of apperception 'alone does full justice to the full concept of *Gestalt*. For *Gestalt* is more than image; it is the unity encountering the perceiver that is also simultaneously manifest in the experience of self (in the contemplated reality of the *cogito/sum*), so that the object encountered and the "I"...truly communicate in the all-one depth of reality (*esse*).'¹⁴⁴ This does not occur without images but defines them as manifestations of an actual being. Thus, Balthasar understands how a person grasps the existential and essential unity of other beings as a unified whole, and thereby being as the source of this whole, as a single act of the person's intellectual apperception in its participation in *esse*. It is thus that the subject 'interpret[s] forms as totalities.'¹⁴⁵

As already noted, however, the subject's unity of apperception is not simply an *a priori* transcendental act of the thinking subject which imposes unity on appearing objects. Rather the intellectual subject's unity also, paradoxically, depends on the prior reality of the object of any encounter. It is this that makes it a truly transcendent act since it requires the other as other where both subject and object share in the unity of *esse*. The thinking subject's unity is not, therefore, simply something it possesses itself. The subject's unity of thinking and being is not self-contained in a way that must be related, in a second extrinsic act, to the object as additional content. Rather openness to the other is intrinsic to the subject's intellectual act of apperception by virtue of its participation in *esse* as shared by the object. As Balthasar says, there 'is no moment when subjectivity monadically and self-sufficiently rests in itself. Rather, subjectivity is a matter of finding oneself always already engaged in the world. The unity of the ego as subject is always also the "unity of apperception," which comes about in the act of synthetic judgement in the cognition of the object.'¹⁴⁶ This reaffirms how the unity of apperception's vertical openness to *esse* is also always a horizontal unity-in-others. The subject's intellectual unity as I am, and so its capacity to apperceive

¹⁴² E, 52.

¹⁴³ For a discussion of the challenges that besets modern philosophy regarding the relationship between the unity of the transcendental self and the empirically encountered self, see *DST*, 101-108.

¹⁴⁴ E, 63

¹⁴⁵ E, 61.

¹⁴⁶ *TL1*, 47.

the ontological unity and reality of others, is dependent on the object's invitation which in turn gives itself to the receptive subject.

As Balthasar says, subject and object

comprehend each other reciprocally, in the sense that the subject is introduced into the ever vaster world of the object, while the object's appearance opens it to be surveyed and judged from the subject's more comprehensive vantage point. This polarity reaches a maximum in the tension between the subject's contemplative, observant posture vis-à-vis the object (truth as *theoria*), and its spontaneous, creative, normatively measuring posture vis-à-vis the same object (truth as *poiesis*).¹⁴⁷

The reference, in this passage, to the subject's spontaneous activity, and, earlier, to how the unity of apperception includes an act of synthetic judgement concerning the object, discloses how the intellect is not merely receptive to the transcendent unity of the object's *Gestalt* but dependent on the subject's outward movement towards the object. Thus, the whole subject moves towards the object which it apperceives as a whole. This indicates how intellectual apperception is active towards the object in a way analogous to the will's movement from subject to object.

Before considering the act of will, more can be said about how the intellect relates to the prior appearance of the object only through the activity of the senses. As noted above, the subject's act of apperception of the object is inseparable from the prior perceiving action of the senses. By apperceiving the object, the subject gathers and recognises the unity and reality of the other on the basis of all the partial ways it appears to the senses.¹⁴⁸ In line with Balthasar's adoption of Thomist and Aristotelian epistemology this in turn involves the activity of the imagination as mediating between the senses and intellect. Thus the intellect actively abstracts concepts and forms mental words in the act of understanding that draws from the images/phantasms formed in the imagination. At the same time the intellect, mediated by the will, turns to the actually existing object encountered by the senses only through mediation of the imagination.¹⁴⁹ The reality of the object is in turn affirmed as participating in *esse* and pointing to real essences by the intellect's act of judgement as mediated by the will. As Balthasar says, while 'things that really exist want to make themselves known not only in images and phantasms but, more importantly, in their reality...;' this

¹⁴⁷ *TL1*, 43.

¹⁴⁸ *Cf.*, *E*, 78.

¹⁴⁹ *E*, 62-63.

occurs insofar as the spirit, in the unity of its apperception, can grasp the real essences of beings in the light of *esse* by way of images that are themselves illumined by this same light.¹⁵⁰

Beyond the power of the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*], but not without it, there occurs what can be characterised as “formation” [*Bilung*]: the constant, never-concluded, mutual process in which the recognizer ascribes to real things their valid essence behind their place in the world of images, while the things from their side do not simply populate the cognizing spirit with images but shape [*aus-bilden*] the spirit to itself.¹⁵¹

From the above, we can see that the act of apperceiving the totality of another being as it appears in an image to the imagination also entails a movement from subject towards the object which shapes the subject. This reiterates how any act of knowledge is, for Balthasar, mediated by the will as the rational appetite whereby the subject goes towards the object that it perceives according to the senses. Indeed, the act of knowledge culminates not in an abstract concept, but the intellect’s turning back to the image in the imagination and so the object by way of an act of judgement which pertains to both an act of the intellect and will.¹⁵² Judgement, therefore, is not isolated from the unity of apperception, nor the act of the imagination, but occurs simultaneously with them as an act of self-commitment and freedom, enacted within the shared light of being.¹⁵³ Moreover, Balthasar, like Aquinas, insists on the importance of language for the intellectual apprehension of the essential unity of beings, affirming in judgement their veracity as actually existing while enabling the subject to express and receive anew its own unity and being.¹⁵⁴ Language is how a person self-consciously enacts and gives subsistence to *esse* in concrete encounters between the perceiving, judging, speaking and knowing subject, and the image-bound appearing object in their joint participation in *esse*.

The above stresses the inseparability of the acts of the intellect and will. They are not successive acts of the subject but rather act jointly with respect to the object which appears and gives itself to be known. Balthasar here contributes to a longstanding debate about the nature of the relationship

¹⁵⁰ *E*, 78.

¹⁵¹ *E*, 63.

¹⁵² Cf., *E*, 61 where Balthasar refers to an ‘intuitive judgment’ that grasps ‘totalities beforehand in their appearance from the depths.’ This concerns an aesthetic judgement which requires deepening in the good and truth. As he suggests, the account of judgement I offer above, simplifies somewhat Balthasar’s more complex understanding where the act of judgement has distinct moments related to beauty, goodness and truth. I discuss this more fully in chapter four.

¹⁵³ Cf., *E*, 82.

¹⁵⁴ See *E*, 79.

between the will and the intellect in Thomist thought.¹⁵⁵ With Aquinas, Balthasar affirms that each power of human nature is mediated by the other.¹⁵⁶ Hence, the act of self-conscious freedom is 'both an understanding and an affirming, and while it is true that only something that has been understood can be affirmed, the will provides the stimulus to such understanding. Every one-sided attribution of freedom, whether to the area of rationality...or of the pure will...leads back to the subhuman, instinctual level.'¹⁵⁷ Rather than being isolated, the movement of intellect from object to subject is mediated by an act of the will whereby the subject moves to the object. This occurs both in the movement of the subject to the object in the act of perception, and in the assent of the will in free judgement. Similarly, the movement of the will from subject to object is mediated by an act of the intellect since it is the known object which moves the will. As Schindler argues, this mutual mediation is what gives the act of each faculty 'an inner resistance, and therefore a depth, within its own order, and what makes every union a *mediated* immediacy.'¹⁵⁸ This means, however, that the movement of the intellect cannot simply be defined as that from object to subject, and the movement of the will the reverse. They each echo in their own movement the movement of the other. Thus, the characteristic movement of intellect whereby the object is taken to the subject also includes a movement of the subject to the object which appropriate to that of the will. Likewise, the movement of the subject to the object, which is characteristic of the will, also includes a movement of the object to the subject which is appropriate to that of the intellect. Indeed, to affirm their mutual dependency 'we would have to take the will to be a (positive) *principle* of the intellect within the intellect's proper order, and at the same time, in order to avoid reducing the intellect to the will, we would have to affirm the intellect as a (positive) *principle* of the will.'¹⁵⁹ This points, therefore, to a reciprocal causality between them such that the intellect and will are '*intrinsically* related to each

¹⁵⁵ Aquinas gives differing accounts of whether the will or intellect has priority. In *De Veritate*, 21.3, he accords relative priority to the good and the will insofar as this concerns the final end. In *ST*, however, the true and so the intellect have absolute priority. *ST*, 1a.16.4; 1a.27.3, ad 3; 1a.82.4, ad 3; 1a2ae.27.2. Conversely, Aquinas affirms that in creation any act of the intellect is preceded by an act of will. The intellect and the will set each other in motion. *ST*, 1a.82.4. To prevent infinite regression, Aquinas insists on the intellect's ultimate priority. *ST* 1a.82.4, ad 3. This can, however, be further nuanced regarding the soul's love of God whereby the will raises the soul beyond what can be attained by the intellect. See, D.C. Schindler, "Towards A Non-Possessive Concept Of Knowledge: On The Relation Between Reason And Love In Aquinas And Balthasar," *Modern Theology* 22, (2006): 584-585.

¹⁵⁶ Aquinas refers to the 'circumcession' of the true and the good, and so the intellect and the will. *De Veritate*, 3.3, ad 9. For an analysis of the implications of this, see D.C. Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth: On the Order of the Transcendentals in Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Trilogy*," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85, (2011): 307. On the reciprocity between the intellect and will in Aquinas, see Winfried Czapiewski, *Das Schöne bei Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 106–111; and Pierre Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, trans. Joseph Donceel and Avery Dulles (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1990).

¹⁵⁷ *TD2*, 211.

¹⁵⁸ *DST*, 379.

¹⁵⁹ *DST*, 385.

other..., which means being *simultaneously* a positive principle of the other and dependent on the other....¹⁶⁰ However, this means that, to be acts of the same person, they must cohere in a unity beyond themselves within a greater whole that is distinct yet inseparable from them. Balthasar understands this whole as the heart.

4. The Heart's Joyful Attunement

What Balthasar means by the heart, and its relationship to the other spiritual faculties of human nature as their concrete unity, is important to clarify because the heart is determinative for how humans encounter, in their self-conscious freedom, the wonder and beauty of being as manifested concretely in beings. The heart is a key focus for Balthasar in *GL1*.¹⁶¹ He uses it not just metaphorically but metaphysically for the relationship of the whole human person to being itself. He describes this as 'attunement' to being.¹⁶² As we shall see, the heart's attunement is commensurate with the power of the imagination and the latter's mediation between the senses and the intellect, and the will and the intellect. Attunement is not, therefore, simply identical to the receptive act of intellectual apperception, nor the latter's interdependent relationship with the spontaneous act of will. Rather it encompasses them both in an *a priori* ontological openness of the whole person to *esse*. As Balthasar states, it 'is not by means of one isolated faculty that man is open, in knowledge and in love, to the Thou, to things and to God: it is *as a whole* (through all his faculties) that man is attuned to total reality....'¹⁶³

Balthasar connects this to an ontological sense of 'feeling', 'sensing' or 'experience.'¹⁶⁴ In more biblical idiom, this is 'the "heart"' or "'bowels"' and concerns 'the seat...of man's deepest personal reactions....'¹⁶⁵ Such corporeal terminology emphasises that attunement is no abstract intellectual or purely volitional relationship to being. Conversely, neither is it reduced to sub-rational emotional states or sensory perception. It involves 'acts that predominately belong to the whole person and into which the expressions of the sensitive-vegetative sphere are incorporated....'¹⁶⁶ Hence, to the notion of attunement, 'feeling' adds an emphasis on 'the heart of human wholeness, where all man's faculties (*potentiae*) appear rooted in the unity of his *forma substantialis*, regardless of

¹⁶⁰ *DST*, 386.

¹⁶¹ Cf., *TL2*, 232. Balthasar here refers to the centrality of the notion of the heart to Augustine and commends the work of Anton Maxsein, *Philosophia Cordis: Das Wesen der Personalitat bei Augustinus* (Salzburg: O. Muller, 1966).

¹⁶² The German term Balthasar employs is *Einstimmung* which, as Schindler, *DST*, 123n.83, notes has a variety of meanings such as joining-in, agreement, tuning, good or appropriate mood or disposition.

¹⁶³ *GL1*, 244.

¹⁶⁴ *GL1*, 243.

¹⁶⁵ *GL1*, 243.

¹⁶⁶ *GL1*, 243.

whether these faculties are of a spiritual, a sensitive, or a vegetative kind.¹⁶⁷ Balthasar expands this in line with Aquinas: ‘this ontological disposition is, in the living and sentient being, an *a priori* concordance (*con-sensus* as *cum-sentire*, “to feel with,” here prior to the *assentire*, “to assent to”).’¹⁶⁸ Such feeling with, or prior consent to, being applies, moreover, to how a person relates to other beings. ‘The inclination to the “thing itself” (*inclination ad rem ipsam*), evoked by a most intimate kinship with it, is characterised as a “feeling” or “sensing” – “an experiential contact” – in so far as the feeler is by his nature attuned to what is felt and, therefore, as-sents and con-sents to it....’¹⁶⁹

This can be further specified. The heart’s feeling, while a distinct spiritual faculty, is not isolated from the intellect and will but integrates them. As Balthasar says, what ‘is termed “feeling”, in contradistinction to intellect and will, lies neither “beside” nor “beneath” the spiritual faculties....’¹⁷⁰ Indeed, Balthasar criticises how ‘feeling is too exclusively thought of as an isolated act alongside the intellect and the will, and too little understood as the integration of the person’s whole life.’¹⁷¹ Rather, heartfelt attunement is ‘the event by which man’s total constitution and disposition, which are the foundation for everything else, can be experienced in and through individual emotion states.’¹⁷² Furthermore, the ‘reciprocal compenetration’ of all the human faculties in the heart stresses how these faculties ‘are penetrated by the soul which acts and suffers through them.’¹⁷³ The heart’s ontological consent to *esse*, as human nature’s ‘most interior disposition’ is, therefore, prior to distinct spiritual acts of the intellect and will without being separate from them.¹⁷⁴ It integrates them as a concrete, rather than abstract, whole which, therefore, both transcends the intellect and will yet is wholly immanent to and enacted through them. Hence, the heart is neither irrational nor capricious, but more-than-simply-rational-and-volitional. It is not separate from acts of the intellect and will but ‘their foundation and very possibility.’¹⁷⁵

Closely related to how the heart encompasses the intellect and will is the way it is both active and receptive. As Balthasar says, it is ‘prior to the distinction between active and passive experience: in the reciprocity which is founded on openness to reality there is contained both the receptivity to extraneous im-pression and the ex-pressing of the self onto the extraneous. This, the fundamental

¹⁶⁷ *GL1*, 242-243.

¹⁶⁸ *GL1*, 244.

¹⁶⁹ *GL1*, 244.

¹⁷⁰ *GL1*, 243.

¹⁷¹ *GL1*, 245.

¹⁷² *GL1*, 245.

¹⁷³ *GL1*, 243.

¹⁷⁴ *GL1*, 246.

¹⁷⁵ *GL1*, 246.

act of feeling (the “primal feeling”), consists of the consent (*con-sensus*) both to suffer extraneous impressions and to act upon the extraneous....¹⁷⁶ Such openness denotes a freedom prior to any deliberate act of will that is not purely passive. It is a concrete ‘event of reciprocity’ that is simultaneously active and receptive and located in the subject-object encounter and their joint mediation of *esse*.¹⁷⁷ This reciprocal whole, moreover, points beyond itself to its transcendent source in God whereby the heart’s ontological openness embodies both humanity and being’s contingent openness to God.¹⁷⁸ ‘The creature is ontologically resonant to God and for God; it is this in its totality and prior to any differentiation of its faculties into spiritual and sensuous, active and passive.’¹⁷⁹ Significantly, therefore, Balthasar identifies the structure of the heart’s attunement as one of a fundamental receptivity to God and to God’s gift of *esse* which is, however, expressed in the heart’s simultaneously active and receptive relationship to being in the subject-object encounter.¹⁸⁰ Accordingly, the heart’s act of radically receptive attunement to being is at the same time an active receptivity where equal priority is accorded to, on the one hand, being’s prior active objectivity which is receptive to the subject’s engagement and, on the other hand, the subject’s active receptivity to the latter.

The heart's radical ontological receptivity, as made manifest in a jointly active and receptive asymmetrical reciprocity between subject and object, underpins the ontologically positive nature of the human heart’s attunement to being as it appears in particular beings. This is where the heart’s association with the imagination and senses as well as the intellect and will is important. It emphasises that the fundamental receptivity of the heart’s reciprocity is rooted in the jointly sense-based and intellectual perception of being in appearing objects which move the entirety of the subject according to the latter’s freedom and, therefore, anticipates and awaits the free assent of the will. This further develops how, as mentioned above, the heart is a distinctive third faculty of human spiritual nature that encompasses as a concrete whole the intellect and will, and, crucially, their relationship to the sensory world. As Schindler comments, because the heart’s attunement is both receptive and active, with priority given to the subject’s receptivity to the object's concrete appearance, ‘it can include the whole scope of the orders of the intellect and the will in their relatively opposed movements without foreshortening or reducing them.’¹⁸¹ The heart simultaneously engages the intellect and will, not ‘in a way that “pre-empt” their own distinct

¹⁷⁶ *GL1*, 244.

¹⁷⁷ *DST*, 125-126.

¹⁷⁸ *GL1*, 244-245.

¹⁷⁹ *GL1*, 244-245.

¹⁸⁰ *GL1*, 246.

¹⁸¹ *DST*, 394.

movements and thus the integrity of their own order.... Instead, it is their “seed.”¹⁸² This account of the heart’s concrete sensed-based attunement to being, as incorporating the movements of the intellect and will, and so the whole person, echoes the primacy Balthasar allots to being’s beauty. The heart is, in short, the organ of beauty. As Balthasar summarises this, ‘[b]efore the beautiful – no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful – the whole person quivers. He not only “finds” the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it...’¹⁸³ I shall return to this in chapter four.

Balthasar associates this positive sense of the heart’s *a priori* consent to being’s beauty as it appears concretely in the beauty of beings with ontological joy. Like Balthasar’s ontological rendering of feeling, this joy is not simply emotional or psychological. Rather, it applies foremost to the whole person enacting their fundamental consent to *esse*. ‘This ontological concordance, therefore, and the affirmation and joy in Being which are implied by it, lie at a much deeper level than the *delectatio* which naturally accompanies all the individual spiritual acts which are ordered to their proper object and which proceed from the storehouse of that primal and original consonance...’¹⁸⁴ Such heartfelt joy denotes a primordial ecstasy permeating each person’s self-conscious freedom in its participation in the ecstasy of being’s letting be. Not only is being a source of joy but this joy wholly characterises the self-opening reciprocity of being itself. Such joy marks the very shape of the heart’s reciprocal attunement to being as it appears in beings. As Schindler expands, ‘joy is...what characterizes the reciprocity at the root of consciousness.... [C]onsciousness *is* essentially joy – *in its very structure*.’¹⁸⁵ Indeed, Balthasar’s makes this heartfelt ontological joy the measure of self-conscious activity. This represents an ‘intra-worldly discernment of spirits’ where each encounter is assessed against the joy of being. This asks; ‘Does the joy of an act (or the sadness of an act) positively point to the joy of Being? Or, no matter how seductively an act may strongly and obviously be experienced as an act of joy, could it not in reality be an act that veils and clouds the joy of Being?’¹⁸⁶

5. Mother-Child Encounter

I return now to Balthasar’s understanding of the primordial and paradigmatic instance of the heart’s wonder-filled joy at being’s beauty, namely, the child’s awakening to self-consciousness through its

¹⁸² *DST*, 397.

¹⁸³ *GL1*, 247-248.

¹⁸⁴ Cf., *GL1*, 244. This represents Balthasar’s take on Aquinas, *ST*, 1a2ae.15.1.

¹⁸⁵ *DST*, 127. As Schindler notes, *DST*, 127n.98, seeing the ecstatic structure of consciousness as joy distinguishes Balthasar from Heidegger’s notion of ek-stasis as angst.

¹⁸⁶ *GL1*, 246.

parents' love. I focus, first, on the child-mother encounter and then expand this perspective to include both parents.

5.1. The objectivity of the mother's call and the receptivity of the child's heart

We can develop how the birth of a child's self-consciousness involves a coincidence of freedom and indebtedness. Self-consciousness is not principally characterised by autonomous self-moving act, but a paradoxical acting by being acted upon by another. We can examine this more specifically according to the heart's dynamic between receptivity and activity. It is the child's receptivity to the prior activity of its mother that establishes the joint receptivity and activity that characterises its self-conscious openness to being. Hence, a child's consciousness, and so self-consciousness itself, is constituted as an event of meeting. This simultaneously encompasses the mother's initiating movement and the child's responding movement. The mother reaches down to her child who receives her prior objective reality, and shares in her active engagement, enabling it actively to move its whole self ecstatically upward to the mother who welcomes the child. Against modern conceptions of self-consciousness, Schindler notes, the child's subjectivity does not appropriate the object 'according to pre-established conditions of possibility, and therefore according to the subject's own measure, ...[rather] the subject *actively* goes out "objectively" to the other on the strength of the other's invitation and is actively received there.'¹⁸⁷ This encounter establishes that consciousness has 'the structure of being invited (receptively), going (spontaneously), and being received.'¹⁸⁸ In this dramatic event of encounter, the child's self-conscious freedom is entwined from the beginning with that of its mother's, and its activity participates in its mother's activity. Rather than threatening the child's freedom, the mother's engagement establishes the child's capacity for free self-conscious participation in *esse*.

This aligns with the heart's attunement to being. In fact, it establishes the basic character of this attunement as one of childlikeness. This informs how the heart integrates and underpins the receptivity of the intellect, the spontaneity of the will, their mutual penetration of each other, and their interaction with the senses through which the person encounters the reality of the appearing object's *Gestalt*. Hence, the prior objectivity of the mother's loving gift does not merely actualise an abstract ontological receptivity in the child but evokes the first stirrings of the child's heart, and so intimately shapes how the child's heart encompasses the child's fledging acts of intellectual apprehension and willing self-gift.

¹⁸⁷ *DST*, 113.

¹⁸⁸ *DST*, 113.

It is important, however, to stress the asymmetry of this encounter. The child is utterly dependent on its mother. The content of the mother's engagement with her child, however, is not one of pure activity, but active receptivity. As Schindler states, without this the mother 'would smother the child, and force his consciousness into the ill-fitting mould of a pure passive receptacle for the mother's own self;' instead, '[t]he way she gives herself, her *being*, is by giving the positive space of welcoming to the child's being. This is why Balthasar says that the love of the mother is a *creative call*; it is a spontaneous receptivity that gives rise to a receptive spontaneity.¹⁸⁹ Again, the mother's active receptivity is fundamentally an act of the heart. In contrast to her child, however, the mother is a fully conscious adult who can offer the actively receptive consent of her heart to being through integrated acts of her intellect and will as expressed in the language of gesture and word. Such maternal receptivity is not about sheer will or self-denial; nor, mere passivity. By affirming and expressing the heartfelt nature of her response through nurture, the mother actively welcomes her child's wholehearted response, thereby enabling the first fledgling acts of the child's intellect and will.

5.2. *The mother's concrete mediation of being and the beginning of language*

The immediate relationship between being and self-consciousness (where this is, paradoxically, characterised by *esse's* pure mediation as letting be), as expressed in the child's self-consciousness, depends on the mediated character of the child-mother encounter. As Balthasar says, '[m]ediation mediates the nonmediate, and into the nonmediate.'¹⁹⁰ This is significant because it ensures that the child's self-consciousness is not simply absorbed into that of its mother or wholly extraneous to it. The mediated nature of their encounter concerns, particularly, how the child's self-conscious awakening to the immediacy of being is occasioned by the concrete, image-based encounter with its mother. Schindler explains this vis-à-vis the child's awakening:

this original experience, which does not allow at this point any "room" for the child to take a "sceptical distance" (which would already presuppose a formed consciousness), is what enables the child to "read" the (noumenal) *being* of the mother – who gives her *self* in the smile and not just the physical movement of her curling lips – *immediately* through the *mediation* of the (phenomenal) appearance. It is not *merely* immediacy, which the child would not be able to *read*, or *interpret*, since doing so requires the movement that only the difference of mediation can allow. Nor is it merely mediation, which would require from the

¹⁸⁹ *DST*, 118.

¹⁹⁰ *TD2*, 391.

child a capacity for “reflective” inference that he cannot possibly yet possess. Instead, it is a mediated immediacy, a presence that bears within itself an “open space.”¹⁹¹

This can be contrasted with the Hegelian identification of childhood with a sheer indeterminate immediacy between empty being and incipient consciousness.¹⁹² For Balthasar, by contrast, there is from the outset a mediated sense of immediacy replete with the fullness of *esse*. This reflects the ontologically positive and joyful relationship between consciousness and being as manifested in the child’s awakening through the concrete appearance of its mother’s self. It also echoes the heart’s childlike attunement to being’s beauty as manifested in another’s essential reality. As Balthasar expands: ‘the epiphany of Being has sense only if in the appearance [*Erscheinung*] we grasp the essence that manifests itself [*Ding an sich*]. The infant comes to the knowledge, not of a pure appearance, but of his mother in herself. That does not exclude our grasping the essence only through the manifestation and not in itself...’¹⁹³

In awakening to itself through the mother’s concrete presence, the child’s heart is given the ontological ability to interpret images as the concretely mediated appearance of the immediacy of being, that is, of how *esse* subsists in the essential ground of a being. More fully, the heart’s interpretative capacity participates in the interpretive character of being itself, namely, the immediacy of *esse* as a pure mediation of letting be mediated by actual beings. While this is not the interpretation of a mature mind, nor the assent of a fully formed will, it shapes the first acts of a child’s intellect and will whereby it engages with other beings.

Balthasar identifies the heart’s act of ontological interpretation with the beginning of human language. As examined in chapter one, this is being itself as communicative language.¹⁹⁴ Human language participates in being’s own communicative letting-be and concretely arises out of the child’s aforementioned capacity to interpret the sensible image as the appearance of an essential ground which opens to being.¹⁹⁵ Here Balthasar opposes the view that language is simply innate.¹⁹⁶ Rather, he ties the genesis of language to the awakening of the child’s heartfelt attunement to being through the concrete mediation and appearance of the immediacy of its mother’s heartfelt love wherein *esse* shines. As Balthasar notes,

¹⁹¹ *DST*, 113.

¹⁹² Cf., *TD2*, 391.

¹⁹³ *MW*, 114-115.

¹⁹⁴ Cf., *TD2*, 391-392n.109

¹⁹⁵ Cf., *TL2*, 255.

¹⁹⁶ Cf., *TL2*, 255-256, where Balthasar pits his position against Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt.

[d]oubtless, the child is...initiated into the art of speaking by others, yet this art is preceded by the inner impulse to intellectual expression...that occurs in the dawning of being (in my own I and thus in all beings). This event is the elementary insight that I am, am, that is, in and thanks to being, yet am not being (but “only” one existent). I, an existent who belongs to being, am “given custody” of myself by a “pronouncement” [*zugesprochen*] of being. Needless to say, this pronouncement is not an audible word (the whole event occurs in the most profound silence).¹⁹⁷

Through the pronouncement of the concrete image and silent word of the mother’s love, the child is ‘given custody’ of itself and the capacity to express itself and being through images. The childlike openness of the heart’s attunement to being, and the concrete dependence on others this entails, thus informs every subsequent encounter with and interpretation of concrete images as the basis of language.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, as I consider shortly, for Balthasar, this makes love the source of language.

5.3. Love interpreting love

This brings us to consider how the ecstatic wholehearted response of the child to its mother’s gift of self is one of wholehearted love. As Balthasar says,

[the child’s] interpretation of the mother’s smiling and of her whole gift of self is the answer, awakened by her, of love to love, when the “I” is addressed by the “Thou”; and precisely because it is understood in the very origin that the “Thou” of the mother is not the “I” of the child, but both centers move in the same ellipse of love, and because it is understood likewise in the very origin that this love is the highest good and is absolutely sufficient and that, a priori, nothing higher can be awaited beyond this, so that the fullness of reality is in principle enclosed in this “I”-“Thou” (as in paradise)...: for this reason, everything – “I” and “Thou” and the world – is lit up from this lightning flash of the origin with a ray so brilliant and whole that it also includes a disclosure of God.¹⁹⁹

This response of the child’s fully awakened love to the mother’s love, because it discloses the fullness of *esse* and opens to God as the source of *esse*, reiterates Balthasar’s ontological account of love. Implicit in this ‘first experience of Being on the part of the awakening human spirit’ is that ‘Being and love are coextensive.’²⁰⁰ Recalling the discussion in the previous chapter, this ontological

¹⁹⁷ *TL2*, 255.

¹⁹⁸ Cf., *TL2*, 256

¹⁹⁹ *MTG*, 15.

²⁰⁰ *MTG*, 17.

notion of love concerns both the gift character of *esse* as pure letting be which is simultaneously a giving and receiving, and also how this is only fully expressed in the freedom and self-gift between persons. What we now see is how this is mediated to a child by its mother's love in an event of intimately human asymmetrical reciprocity.

In being awakened by its mother's love, the child is gifted its own loving response. The child does not first receive the gift of awakening from its mother's prior love and then respond in a subsequent act. Rather, the whole thing is a unified event: the child awakens to itself in the act of responding, and responds in the act of awakening. As Balthasar says: 'Insofar as he *gives* himself, the child perceives: *I give myself*.'²⁰¹ This is, however, a function of the mother's gift of love. As Schindler says, this involves 'a profound paradox: the child's giving of himself, which is in fact the only thing the child has to give and is thus his most interior, intimate act, lies in a strict sense *beyond his means*. It occurs as a grace, not stemming from the child himself, but stemming from the mother, whose smile the child knows he himself did not create.'²⁰²

We can see this more concretely as a heart-to-heart encounter wherein mother and child are both 'centres' moving in the 'same ellipse of love' and their hearts act as concrete means of 'love interpreting love'. As Balthasar says, 'where love summons the "I" into the state where it is permitted to answer, the "I" is affected in the core of its being and can reply only with its totality, its centre, its fullness: it must collect together what is best in itself in order to respond to that summons. It comes into play at once as a totality.'²⁰³ This wholehearted free response of love, whereby the child's entire spiritual freedom is awoken and expressed, is no less spiritual through the absence of prior deliberation or willing on its part. As Balthasar expands: 'the little child does not "consider" whether it will reply with love or nonlove to its mother's inviting smile, for just as the sun entices forth green growth, so does love awaken love; it is in the movement toward the "Thou" that the "I" becomes aware of itself.'²⁰⁴ Simply because the child's response comes before any conscious reflection and willing does not mean it is an irrational, forced, arbitrary or blind action of a sub-conscious kind. Rather the response, as one of the heart, includes the child's whole spiritual act of coming to self-consciousness underpinning all reflecting and willing. In the child's ecstatic movement

²⁰¹ *MTG*, 16.

²⁰² *DST*, 118.

²⁰³ *MTG*, 16.

²⁰⁴ *MTG*, 16.

into the 'open world that offers its space,' the child 'experiences its freedom, its knowledge, its being as spirit.'²⁰⁵

Balthasar calls this act of the heart 'a perfect and immediate intuition': this is 'not a discursive process of reasoning because the mother's smile is not interpreted as love subsequently; it is intuition, too, because in the awakening spirit the understanding of being as such is always awaiting the moment of realization, and this precisely in the concrete event that is offered through ever-open, ever-watchful senses.'²⁰⁶ This intertwines two senses of intuition, first, the child's immediate encounter with and response of love as pertaining to the immediacy of *esse*; and, secondly, how this ontological reality is mediated by sense-based intuition. The intuitive act of the child's heart, therefore, encompasses, in one complex and unified act, the child's unity of apperception whereby it grasps the mother in her totality through her concrete appearance and effects its first act of synthetic judgement. These together amount to an act of the child's whole person. It is an act of love responding to love. This allows us to specify how, through its heart's responsiveness, the child interprets *esse* in the mediated immediacy of its mother's gesture in a way that also marks the beginning of language. The interpretation and language of the heart correspond not only to how being discloses itself in the concrete particular. It also reflects how this disclosure is the interpretation and language of being as love.

5.4. *The transcendentals and joy*

Framing this wholehearted encounter in terms of the co-extension between love and being has metaphysical significance not only for mother and child but for what it discloses about being. As Balthasar states,

[L]ove is understood to be the most pristine source of all. This understanding opens up in the child the dormant bud of self-awareness. The love between a thou and an I inaugurates the reality of a world which is deeper than simple being because of its absolute boundlessness and plenitude. And, since this opening up occurs on the basis of love, unbounded being is seen to be the reality that makes sense, that is self-evidently right: in short, the truth which is identical with the good.²⁰⁷

Balthasar here unequivocally rejects the Hegelian idea that the child's awakening to itself through the love of another person is one of sheer empty existence. Rather, the child is welcomed into the

²⁰⁵ *MTG*, 16.

²⁰⁶ *UBC*, 18.

²⁰⁷ *UBC*, 17-18.

fullness of the act of *esse* which manifests itself positively in the child's awakening according to being's transcendental aspects. Balthasar mentions specifically the true and good, but these cannot be separated from the primacy he accords the beautiful.²⁰⁸ Moreover, echoing the earlier discussion of the heart, identifying the child's awakening with the fullness of being according to its transcendental aspects chimes with how the child's wholehearted response of love is characterised by an ecstatic sense of ontological joy – the very structure of consciousness in its openness to the joy of being as fully expressed in the loving encounter between persons.

[This] belongs to the highest joy bestowed by love: since the summons by the mother is not addressed to something *in* the child but to the child itself beyond the sum of its qualities (which it can share with other children), precisely in the reality of the "I" of the child, it experiences at the same time that my "I" is loved, is lovable for my mother, and that my reply can lie only in the gift of this "I" – together with all that may belong to it....²⁰⁹

For all the asymmetry of this encounter, it is not simply about the mother's unilateral act towards the child. It is reciprocal. Hence, while the child's love is carried and enabled on the strength of its mother's love for the child in its own lovability; the mother is also lovable in her own right. The lovability and capacity for love of both mother and child are, therefore, simultaneously disclosed within the asymmetry between them where both participate in the single joy of being as love.

6. Love Between Parents

We have focused thus far on the mother. She is, however, not the only adult engaged with the child. How she relates to her child reflects a prior set of relationships, especially with the child's father, most obviously in the conception of the child, but also regarding the child's coming to self-consciousness. This is important, especially, for guaranteeing the appropriately receptive nature of the mother's engagement so as not to overwhelm the child but offer a welcoming space. To protect the difference of the child within the unity of their relationship, the child's self-consciousness is, as Schindler says, not to be understood as 'produced "immediately" by the mother's love, but as both mediated and immediate in its emerging as the fruit of the *parents'* mutual self-gift.'²¹⁰

If until now, therefore, I have principally considered the heart-to-heart encounter between mother and child, this clarifies that it cannot simply be about the mother's isolated heart. Her heart is nourished, opened and made receptive to her child's being because of the love she shares with adult

²⁰⁸ *MW*, 114.

²⁰⁹ *MTG*, 16-17.

²¹⁰ *DST*, 118-119.

others, particularly, but not exclusively, the child's father. This fills out how the birth of the child's consciousness 'turns on the *gift* character of the encounter, self-gift responding to self-gift. The mother's own gift of self, which initiates this "exchange," is possible only if she in turn has been freed for this gift in being loved by another.'²¹¹ The parents' relationship, therefore, has a bearing on how the child's self-consciousness is awoken and shaped.

Again, this is to be seen metaphysically. The parents mediate to the child, via their mutual love, the immediacy of *esse* as a pure mediated letting be as it subsists within their shared spiritual and embodied existence. Each parent here helps to underwrite the responsiveness of the other's heart whereby they offer a welcoming space wherein to encounter being's beauty and enact the fullness of *esse* in self-giving freedom and shared knowledge. This happens within the concrete gestures, images, language, memories, home and life of responsibility the parents share. Each parent thus frees and is freed by the other. Each is a stakeholder in the other's attempts to act as a person who integrates their various acts with that of their heart and so their whole nature's openness to being. Accordingly, the quality of the parents' relationship safeguards the heart-centric nature of the relationship between each parent and the child that enables the child's heart to enact its attunement to *esse* in the fledgling acts of its intellect and will.

This expands upon how the child's self-consciousness is born within the context of a pre-existing relationship of reciprocity between its parents. Schindler describes this with a neologism: to be 'born(e).' As he expands, '[t]his child's *consciousness...springs organically* from this communion of persons in love, just as his body springs from their bodily communion.... Consciousness is *born(e)*, just like a child is born(e). And this is likewise why it is so original, so rooted in being.... The best name for consciousness, then,... is not merely gift but donum doni (the gift of a gift).'212 These two original metaphysical events of being born(e), and the self-giving relationships occasioning them, are not, however, exactly the same, but analogically related. There is a certain order of priority between them. Let me examine this further.

²¹¹ *DST*, 120.

²¹² *DST*, 120.

6.1. The archetypical identity-in-difference between parents and child

For Balthasar, the relationship between a mother and the child in her womb represents an ‘archetypical identity’ (*urbildliche Identität*).²¹³ This is an identity, however, wherein they remain distinct. The child’s identity is not self-grounding, but rooted in two further differences. First, it depends on the father as a principle of difference. Balthasar states: ‘Between the mother and the child she bears in her womb there exists an “archetypical identity”, a unity which by no means is purely “natural”, “physiological” or “unconscious”: the child is already itself, is already something “other” than the mother because it derives from the man’s seed as much as from her.’²¹⁴ Hence, mother and father are both distinct yet correlated principles of difference. The child is the fruit of their shared fruitfulness, yet irreducible to either. This opens onto a second archetypical identity-in-difference, the relationship between the child and God.²¹⁵

The difference-in-identity between the mother and child, therefore, is not simply guaranteed by the sexual difference of the parents. Nor can the child’s distinct identity and existence be attributed simply to additional biological, psychological, cultural, or environmental causes and processes. ‘Neither my parents nor the whole of the surrounding world are substantially that love to which on the grounds of my being and my consciousness I owe the fact of my being in the world, which is to say both myself and the world.’²¹⁶ The child’s unique personal identity has its source in God. That said, this identity is guaranteed and mediated by the procreative act of the child’s parents and the child’s ongoing relationship to its parents.

With this reliance on sexual reproduction, however, comes a heightened sense of the contingency of each person’s existence as embodied spirit – an existential realisation that surfaces for each person once they attain self-conscious maturity. Furthermore, such contingency is not removed by pointing to God. For, even if we understand our origin as directly created by God, this does not, for Balthasar, obviate a sense of dread about ‘the incomprehensible linking of God’s creative act to nature’s chance acts of generation...to such dark and blind cooperative causes.’²¹⁷ Balthasar here gives qualified affirmation to Heideggerian angst as concerning a person’s ecstatic encounter with being beyond them, and provoking the fundamental questions, ‘Why do I exist?’, ‘Why anything?’.²¹⁸

²¹³ *UBC*, 16. Cf., Gustav Siewerth, *Metaphysik der Kindheit*, 55 and 78, who locates an exemplary identity in the relationship between parents and child.

²¹⁴ *UBC*, 16.

²¹⁵ *UBC*, 16.

²¹⁶ *GL5*, 617.

²¹⁷ *MTG*, 19,

²¹⁸ Cf., *GL1*, 158

Balthasar notes, moreover, how this dreaded question is not sidestepped even if human generation were 'to be performed in a way that is technically more closely guided and planned....'²¹⁹ The latter leaves untouched the question of a person's identity as spirit open to being as whole since the latter transcends any process. These processes too are contingent as to existence. Hence, even if sexual reproduction were overcome through, say, human cloning, this cannot remove the anxiety over being's contingency. Indeed, dread intensifies since a more controlled disembodied way of generating humans obscures how a person's existence can be received as a gift of love based on parents sharing their common spiritual embodied nature.

This redounds on how those who bring a child into existence understand being. That a person's existence can be experienced as a matter of gift rests on a vision of how *esse* as divine gift is mediated by the self-giving love of human parents. As Balthasar says, the parents 'had to be "two in one flesh", with mutual gratitude, in order to be able to procreate in love the new life that surpasses them both, the new life that will owe its existence to both of them together but for which they, together, will always have to be thankful in the sight of the absolute creative Power that transcends them....'²²⁰ The parents are not opaque biological causal agents, provoking dread in any child conceived by them, but cooperative causes who welcome the child in their common heartfelt wonder and thankfulness as a divine gift mediated through their mutual embodied self-giving love. This does not mean a child is born only when procreation is undertaken with love and gratitude. Nevertheless, Balthasar claims this is crucial for bearing the child into self-conscious existence. 'The experience of the *thou* both among men and between God and man grows up out of the realm of the body and the senses into the sphere of the spirit; but in such a way that an original relationship of spirit (man-wife relationship in marriage...) is the prerequisite for this growth.'²²¹ Despite the suggestion, this cannot mean a person is conceived only within marriage. Rather, we can distinguish between, first, the original relationship between a man and woman in the sexual act as the presupposition for the conception of a child; and, second, an original relationship of love as the presupposition for awakening the child to self-consciousness in its spiritual nature.

Here we can consider more fully the relationship between a child being born(e) and consciousness being born(e). The absolute priority of the first birth depends on the relative and final priority of the second which brings *esse's* excess to full subsistence in the child's personal spiritual existence. The latter, however, cannot be uprooted from but displays within itself the paradigmatic significance of

²¹⁹ *GL5*, 617-618.

²²⁰ *UBC*, 16.

²²¹ *GL1*, 340,

the fruitful interdependence of the former. Thus, a child's birth to and enactment of its self-conscious freedom depends on its parent's shared love just as its existence depends on their sharing of the fruitfulness of their human sexual difference.

As Balthasar states, freedom 'only exists in the interrelationship of human beings, particularly since each new human being comes about through other human beings and only awakens to "being human" through the encounter with others, with their freedom and free response. The child arrives with its own freedom; and it is given (by its mother) this other freedom that comes from being in a society with others.'²²² Thus, when the child awakens to its personal being and *esse*, through the self-giving freedom and mutual love of its parents (and not just its mother), it also awakens to the prior reality of its spiritual nature's participation in *esse* as already granted to it by others. This emphasises again the coincidence between ontological freedom and ontological dependence whereby in awakening 'to selfhood, one is simultaneously admitted to one's own being and obliged to respect being-in-its-totality, in which one has been allowed, intentionally, to participate; one must "let it be"....'²²³ The ontological indebtedness that underpins the child's first and absolute ontological freedom, given its origin in human sexual difference, underwrites and directs how the child depends ontologically on others to awaken to self-conscious freedom and for its personal fulfilment.

Indeed, Schindler also applies the analogy between a child's birth and the birth of self-consciousness to how human self-consciousness is intrinsically fruitful. He states, "'fruitfulness" means not only openness to the other as other...but even more concretely as an "always already" being involved in the other, as the other is always already involved in me. The simultaneity of these two opens out further (ahead! Not behind!) to a *new* "third," which then in principle means all possible others....'²²⁴ The ontologically fruitful character of consciousness – as enacting the creative actuality of *esse* – not only reflects its having been born(e) and, therefore, its provenance as gift rooted in prior mutual self-giving. It also coincides with the abiding childlike nature of self-consciousness and, inversely, how being childlike is most fundamentally concerned with how fruitfully to enact one's self-conscious freedom in dependence on others, namely, as a joint mediation of *esse* received and shared freely in childlike wonder as gift.

²²² *TD2*, 203

²²³ *TD3*, 458-459n.6.

²²⁴ *DST*, 121.

6.2. Passive and active expressions of the archetypal identity between parents and child

This childlike core to self-conscious freedom and fruitfulness can be further considered according to a distinction Balthasar makes between a passive/receptive and active experience of the archetypal identity between child and parents.²²⁵ At first, this seems to apply respectively to child and parents. Thus, before the child awakens to self-consciousness, both at its conception and birth, it is receptive to this relationship of identity-in-difference that is actively bestowed upon it by its parents. This entails an absolute receptivity to the wholly original gift of *esse* actively mediated by the parents which brings the child into being with its human nature.

Let us consider this further. First, from the child's perspective, because its receptivity relates to *esse*'s subsistence as the child, from conception the child enacts a receptivity wholly characterised by the actuality of *esse*. Furthermore, *esse* subsists as the child's active human spiritual nature with its unique ontological, albeit not yet consciously appropriated, freedom. As Balthasar notes, this active freedom is inchoately present in ontological terms: 'the "I" of the child is not created by the mother but only brought out of a latency, out of a state of being closed in on itself, into its true being and openness.'²²⁶ This suggests the seed of full conscious activity is present at the genesis of the child's existence. As Walker says, '*[n]ature is already the beginning of the free taking over of itself. Conscious love, then, can very well be present in us from the first moment of our existence...not in its final, developed form, but in an incipient form whose dynamism, already operating without our choice, is the shaping, ordering ground on which choice is...carried up into the daylight of self-consciousness.*'²²⁷ This, however, must be understood against Balthasar's insistence that this incipient freedom is always dependent on prior parental active receptivity.

This reiterates how the child already in the womb moves itself, in its receptive activity, only in dependence on its mother's actively receptive movement towards the child. Thus, the child's embodied spiritual nature receptively enacts the taking over and handing on of *esse* as mediated by its mother's spiritual and embodied participation in *esse*. While not the exercise of the child's fully self-conscious freedom, it is nonetheless the receptive activity of its spiritual nature. There is no contradiction in how the receptive activity of the child's free, yet dormant, spiritual nature remains utterly dependent on the child receiving itself from its mother whereby it grows in a pre-self-conscious way according to its human nature. This occurs in what Balthasar calls 'the sheltering

²²⁵ *UBC*, 24.

²²⁶ *MTG*, 39.

²²⁷ Adrian J Walker, "Personal Singularity and The *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas' Doctrine of *Esse Commune*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, (2004): 462.

place of common human nature;’ and ‘more intimately still, ... the sphere of the common flesh of mother and child.’²²⁸

This can be further correlated to the concrete act of the unborn child’s heart in its dependence on its mother’s heart in the womb. For this common flesh is integral to the embodied and spiritual act of the child’s human heart and emphasises how the child’s first incipient acts are from the first always dependent on its mother. The child ‘enters into existence at a point (which he never leaves behind) where spirit always already – and still yet – slumbers in the flesh, where it “awakens” to itself through the call of the senses, and where it finds its center, not in the brain, but in the heart, in which spirit and body, inseparably intertwined, are “one flesh”.’²²⁹ Balthasar is keen to avoid speculation about the inner life of a child prior to birth.²³⁰ Nevertheless, ontologically, he stresses that ‘even the spiritual soul’s “presence-to-itself” (like the constant actuality of the sense functions, as described by Thomas) is something that has no conceivable beginning, a special form of waking, which, for lack of concepts and words, we cannot distinguish from our awakening to a self-consciousness in a world of things and fellow human beings.’²³¹ As he says elsewhere, ‘there is and remains something profoundly mysterious about the actual form of a consciousness that, humanly speaking, is still dormant; at all events, it cannot be defined simply by negatives.’²³² As I explore more fully in chapter three, Balthasar correlates the child’s slumbering yet mysteriously active heart in the womb to its receptively active participation in its mother’s heart. After its birth, moreover, the child’s archetypical identity-in-difference with its parents is a receptively active one as it continues to depend on them. This applies also when it awakens fully to self-consciousness as the child can only actively give itself through being receptive to its parent’s prior active self-giving.

Secondly, from the parental standpoint, whereas the child first seemed to stand for a pure receptivity within the archetypical identity that turns out to be active from the first, the parents might be seen to have a wholly active experience of the identity-in-difference between them and their child. This arises from the child’s utter dependence on their fully self-conscious activity for its survival. As explored earlier, however, the content of such parental activity is receptive and welcoming to the child. Such receptivity is multifaceted. It is rooted in the parents’ heartfelt self-

²²⁸ *MTG*, 21-22.

²²⁹ *TL2*, 232.

²³⁰ *TD3*, 175-176n.21.

²³¹ *TD3*, 175-176n.21. Balthasar quotes Siewerth: “‘Even the repose of the embryo in the uterus, in the psychic warmth of life’s womb, is not an unconscious, vegetative process but an experienced psychic process of profound depth.... Thus mother and child constitute not merely a physical unity but a community of life and love that involves all the sensitively rippling layers of the psyche.’ Siewerth, *Metaphysik der Kindheit*, 24.

²³² *TD3*, 228.

giving and receptive relationship to each other. It also reflects their abiding receptivity to the prior gifts of *esse*, their human nature and their awakening to self-consciousness. This emphasises that the parents cannot dispense with the reality that they too were once conceived and born; that their hearts also grew within the womb; that they were awoken to self-consciousness by others.

In this light, the parents' actively receptive experience of the archetypical identity with their child reveals itself to be a complex whole that encompasses both vertical and horizontal reciprocities. First, the vertical reciprocity concerns their relationship to their own parents and God, which looks backwards and upwards to their own origin. This verticality also looks forwards and downwards to their child who is also a gift of God. As Balthasar states, even though the parents 'will have an active experience of "archetypical identity", still they will not quite be able to dissociate it from the passive form of it they had once experienced.'²³³ Secondly, the parent's active experience entails a horizontal reciprocity in their relationship to each other which, however, incorporates the vertical reciprocity whereby they open to the gift of divine *esse vis-à-vis* their being from their own parents, their child's being child, and how they mediate being's fullness to each other. This involves, therefore, a complex combination of active and passive/receptive experiences of archetypical identity.

6.3. Non-biological parents

At this point, we can consider an implication of the fact that Balthasar holds the two events of birth and their associated sets of fruitful relationship as not necessarily related. It is possible for people to love each other fully without having children. It is also possible for a child to have biological parents who are different from the adults who awaken it to self-consciousness and foster its developing freedom. Balthasar states, '[t]he mother who brought her child into the world can expose it or give it away, or she can simply die: in this case, the personal address does not take place, or at least it does not come from her.'²³⁴ It is possible, therefore, to speak of adults who, if not the child's biological parents, are its spiritual and embodied parents. The key is a context of self-giving love shared between adults who acknowledge the child as God's gift.

To expand, we can recall how, given finite being's ecstatic structure, those who awaken a child to self-consciousness are at first indistinguishable from God as the source of the child's self-conscious existence and its intuition of being as whole: '[a]lthough it derives from a concrete encounter and thus does not at all communicate an abstract concept of being, this intuition is wholly unbounded

²³³ *UBC*, 24

²³⁴ *MTG*, 37-38.

and reaches to the Ultimate, to the Divine.²³⁵ This need not be limited to a child's biological parents. Indeed, if we take the actual awakening of the child as confirmation of the presence of love, this suggests that love as ontological gift is forthcoming in every situation where a child awakens to self-consciousness; as is the concomitant exposure to the risk of the absence of love. This places significant emphasis on whether the adults caring for the child mediate *esse* as a gift lovingly shared within the concrete archetypical identity-in-difference between a child, its parents, and God.

This accords with the emphasis Balthasar places on the adults' role in helping the child to distinguish the difference between its relationship to those who raise it and to God as the source of the child's existence and identity. With respect to non-biological parents, this means they cannot elide a child's biological provenance in sexual difference and its archetypical identity-in-difference with its biological parents without diminishing how the child's being is a matter of gift. In other words, not only is it important that non-biological parents affirm the child's origin as God's gift, but also how the latter is concretely mediated by the fruitfulness of human sexual difference of the child's biological father and mother. Indeed, for sexual fruitfulness to remain true to the gift-character of this fruitful act of mediation, it needs to be affirmed as an act shared between actual human beings in their openness to God's gift of being through their spiritual and biological nature. If a child is to be affirmed as gift, and it is to be awoken to being as a matter of gift, then its existence cannot be abstracted from the actual people who bring it into existence; nor can its origin simply be reduced to a matter of biological material. The key is whether non-biological parents, like biological parents, celebrate in their own lives and home the child's provenance as a divine gift mediated by the fruitfulness of human sexual difference which is fully enacted in the wholehearted self-giving between concrete persons. Where the latter has not been manifested by a child's biological parents it can be embraced and communicated in the love shared between its adoptive parents. This could, in principle, apply to a child raised by a single parent or parents of the same sex. What is important here is whether a parent is enabled or thwarted in this task by their own parents, wider family and by how any given domestic, cultural, societal and ecclesial context affirms or denies the crucial interrelationship between the fruitfulness of sexual difference and interpersonal love while recognising and safeguarding their equally pivotal difference. Love for a child cannot be reduced to biology, but neither can such love dispense with fully embodied human biology and sexual difference without undermining its own provenance as divine gift that is humanly-mediated.

²³⁵ *UBC*, 18.

7. Filial Character of the Heart

The upshot of the above is that adults who raise a child have a metaphysical mission to inculcate in their child their own abiding childlike wonder. While awakening to self-consciousness in wonder may seem ubiquitous, Balthasar stresses it is not simply an automatic process. 'Before making any judgment or coming to any conclusion, we must marvel as at a miracle....'²³⁶ This is not self-evident. It depends on the adults being open to the wonder of being. This in turn impacts how the child encounters the world and being through its heart's *a priori* consent. As Balthasar states: 'the human child is dependent on free acts of giving by others... Because he is needy he is also thankful in his deepest being, before making any free, moral decisions to be so.... To be a child means to owe one's existence to another, and even in our adult life we never quite reach the point where we no longer have to give thanks for being the persons we are.'²³⁷ This abiding childlike sense of obligation to give thanks for our being as gift redounds upon any adults raising a child. It attaches foremost to the responsibility that comes from fostering a child into existence, and so from an ontological sense of duty or indebtedness that is, however, freely affirmed and enacted.

Parents are, therefore, called to rediscover their passive experience of the archetypical identity where they recall their own status as children. Here the parents' active appropriation of this passive sense of archetypical identity is informed by whether they willingly affirm and recognise *esse* as a gift of divine love. Indeed, this is something they are beckoned to relearn with, and, indeed, from their child's first response to the world;²³⁸ and, from their own parents, or the memory of them, each other, other adults, and the wider expectations and values of their community and culture. Hence, parents retain, within their self-conscious being, an element of their passive/receptive archetypical identity as children vis-à-vis their own parents precisely because they owe them their self-conscious existence – or, better, the shape of their hearts. The childlike dependency at the heart of self-consciousness always remains dependent on a prior set of parental-like mutual relationships. Thus, self-consciousness is at its core filial, not only regarding one's parents but regarding God and God's gift of *esse* as mediated through families.

Here Balthasar contrasts his view with Hegel who holds that the authority of parents over children should be superseded by the 'definitive authority of the state or of society, whose element of fostering care replaces that of the family;' indeed, this is necessary for the development of 'an

²³⁶ *UBC*, 17.

²³⁷ *UBC*, 49.

²³⁸ Cf. *UBC*, 70.

autonomous, self-determined spirit.²³⁹ Balthasar opposes this with Christ's affirmation of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue to honour father and mother which 'enjoins on adults, too, the respectful love of children for parents. Even when the educational element of the parents' authority disappears as the children come of age, this does not abolish the original relationship of giving and responding personal love between children and parents.'²⁴⁰ Indeed, this original relationship imposes on grown-up children a responsibility to care for elderly parents. It remains 'vivid...in the general memory of mankind that this duty out of gratitude on the part of children cannot simply vanish into thin air....' Rather, 'a fragment remains intact of the original "archetypical identity in the distinction between mother and child", as an element of a love that transcends juridical considerations even as it contains them.'²⁴¹

This is a crucial element, therefore, of how grown-up children continue to receive and express their own childlike openness to being. It also underpins how parents relate to their children via an active experience of this archetypical identity. The latter is informed by the passive form of this identity which the adults who raise the children once experienced as children which is informed by their parents' experience, and so on. Indeed, Balthasar explicitly links the passive and active experience of the archetypical experience of grown-up children with an outlook that spans generations.

The experience immerses them in the great stream of memory of generations whom they cannot cease to thank for their existence and whose past becomes for them the present, to the extent that, along with their progeny, they look out toward the future. The reciprocity with which both the past and the future point to the present is...a fragment of archetypical childhood, in which a confident and trusting expectation of the good has its basis in the experience of already having received it.²⁴²

This has a dual significance insofar as the 'fragment of archetypical childhood' is applied to both a person's existence and their self-conscious existence, and so their experience of the archetypical identity with those who have born(e) them into life and into self-conscious life in openness to *esse* as gift. The generational understanding of how a child's self-conscious experience of *esse* is nurtured emphasises how *esse* is transmitted via concrete interpersonal relationships of letting be that welcome each child as a person open to the gift of being as a free conscious spirit. Across generations there is an intertwining mediation of *esse* as gift and self-conscious existence as yet

²³⁹ *UBC*, 23.

²⁴⁰ *UBC*, 23.

²⁴¹ *UBC*, 23-24.

²⁴² *UBC*, 24-25.

further gift, and so also an interweaving of different kinds of interpersonal fostering relationships that involve the fruitful exchanges of sexual difference, and the fruitfulness of interpersonal self-giving. The important point is neither to separate them nor collapse them. Moreover, echoing the significance of the mother's smile, and the parents' shared loving gestures, the generational provenance of self-consciousness is only mediated by concrete gestures, words, images, memories, and habits that open to and give concrete subsistence to *esse*. This fragment of childhood also points beyond the matrix of generational relationships to each person's relationship with God as mediated through the immediacy of the gift of *esse*.

8. Conclusion

The event of the child's awakening to self-consciousness marks a radical new beginning to the child's relationship to being. It is this encounter and beginning that actualizes the objective structure of self-consciousness as receptively active and actively receptive in relation to others. It awakens the child's heart to its joyful attunement to being. The birth of each child's self-conscious existence establishes how the pattern of their freedom is one that is lived under the sign of being as a gift lovingly and concretely shared between persons in wonder. The way a child's heart is first awoken to its *a priori* ontological attunement to being by its adult family, and how they mediate the gift of *esse* to the child, impacts how that person subsequently acts and experiences being.

Maturity here is affected by whether a person freely affirms or denies the ontological indebtedness which is owed variously to their biological parents; the interpersonal adult community who nurture them into self-conscious existence and freedom; and God whose creative *esse* is mediated by these distinct yet inseparable sets of embodied human relationships. To affirm these is to reclaim the abiding childlike dependency and openness to gift that lies at the heart of each person's self-consciousness as a matter of ontological reality.

This accords with Balthasar's account of being's primal form in *GL1*. There he states '[t]he primal form is not a form among others, but a form which is identical with existence, a form beyond "open" and "closed", beyond "I" and "Thou" (since it, and it alone, encompasses both), a form which is even beyond autonomy and heteronomy since it unites God and man in an unimaginably intimacy.'²⁴³ The present chapter argues that this primal form, when fully reflected in human spiritual reality, has a paradigmatic concrete content, namely, the filial and childlike character of the human heart's openness to being. This underscores how humans do not confer the primal form of their existence or self-conscious freedom upon themselves. We do not construct our own freedom but receive the

²⁴³ *GL1*, 25.

form of our freedom, as a participation in the form of being's character as loving gift, simply by being born and awoken to self-conscious freedom by others. Our 'being, even in its origin, is already form, form which does not curtail the spirit and its freedom but which is identical with them.'²⁴⁴ The freedom and self-possession of our nature as embodied spirit is simultaneous with the form which we have appropriated and which enables the spirit's self-expression. 'Such simultaneity is possible because it is the spirit's native condition always to have gone outside itself in order to be with another.'²⁴⁵ Most fully, this communicative core of human nature matches how a child is not self-originating, nor simply the fruit of its parent's biology, choice or, even, self-giving love. Rather, it is a gift rooted in the shared fruitfulness of human sexual difference and interpersonal love yet exceeding them in their openness to the gift of divine *esse*. In the next chapter, I explore how the relationship between consciousness, being, birth, and self-giving love relates to Balthasar's treatment of human sexual difference.

²⁴⁴ *GL1*, 21.

²⁴⁵ *GL1*, 21.

Chapter Three

Critical Juncture of Sexual Difference and the Parent-Child Relationship

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how Balthasar's attribution of primordial and abiding metaphysical importance to the heart's capacity for childlike wonder carries with it an equal, though distinct, significance for the parent-child relationship. The latter brings a child into existence and shapes the child's heart and human self-consciousness. In this chapter, I explore how this unveils the singular significance of the fruitfulness of human sexual difference. I argue for the mutual illumination of sexual difference and the parent-child relationship as jointly constitutive of human existence and nature. Together they underpin how the transcendent unity of human nature in its participation of *esse* coincides with specific human relationships of correlated difference. This identifies them as constitutive relationships in a metaphysical sense. Beyond mere anthropology, they are metaphysical principles of difference considered, not abstractly, but concretely. Male-female, father-mother, and parent-child are, therefore, not merely derivative or provisional aspects of human nature. They embody in a maximal way, in the freedom of spiritual nature, being's analogical nature. A crucial corollary is that these constitutive human relationships are analogous to being a person as explored in the previous chapter. They act as the critical juncture between personhood and being.

In defending this view, I take this also as a critical juncture from which to critique two alternative perspectives. First, I argue that Balthasar's metaphysical vision issues a cogent challenge to the notion prevalent in Western culture that sex/gender is simply a construct.¹ Balthasar re-visions the target of such constructivism, namely, essentialism which identifies sexual difference with fixed traits of human nature. Balthasar proposes a dramatic sense of essence which roots human sexual difference not simply at the level of essence, but also within *esse* as lived out in concrete interactions in the material realm where this cannot finally be separated from the child-parent relationship.

Secondly, I am critical of Balthasar's treatment of sexual difference; particularly, his identification of created being's receptivity as feminine. Here I echo Balthasar's feminist critics. I differ from them, however, in arguing he falls short of his own metaphysical vision as detailed in the previous chapters. In offering an apologia for the latter, I do not stop there, but give a speculative account of human sexual difference that, I maintain, accords with Balthasar's understanding of being. This

¹ Unless indicated, I use the terms sex and gender interchangeably as concerning male and female humanity. I consider this in the next section.

aligns being with, first, the asymmetrical reciprocal receptivity and activity of male and female organic and personal fruitfulness; and, secondly, with the heart's childlike receptivity.

In what follows, I begin with Aristotle's metaphysical legacy regarding sexual difference and contemporary debates concerning sex and gender. Secondly, I consider Balthasar's dramatic approach to human nature and its implications for understanding sexual difference through the lens of its fruitfulness in the child-parent relationship. Thirdly, I show how these constitutive human relationships are the extreme limits of being the same living, spiritual embodied nature. This leads, fourthly, to how Balthasar treats the combined fruitfulness of human sexual difference and the parent-child relationship as paradigmatic for interpersonal spiritual fruitfulness. Fifthly, I critique, along with his feminist critics, Balthasar's distinct treatment of male and female human fruitfulness. Finally, I employ Balthasar's metaphysics to offer an alternative speculative view of the latter.

1. Metaphysics of Sexual Difference

In pursuing a metaphysical agenda, I ask how does human sexual difference and the child-parent relationship relate to being? This explores what assertions about sexual difference claim about being and if sexual difference reveals something about being. As David L. Schindler states, 'a "foundational" treatment of gender distinction cannot finally – responsibly – be avoided. Foundational questions regarding the meaning of gender do not go away when they are not asked explicitly; in fact they only get begged....'² Much contemporary feminist thought is wary of such foundationalism and rejects the metaphysical tradition. By contrast, I pursue a foundational treatment that rests, paradoxically, on being's unfounded nature as divine gift. Such a metaphysical approach differs from an approach that, as it were, passes over being to apply directly a theological solution. The latter is problematic insofar as it ignores how the feminine is considered a metaphysical imperfection. Commenting on this as evident in Scholastic thought, Schindler notes how this is 'offset...by its theological horizon of grace and salvation.'³ However, while this emphasises the positive role and mission of women in salvation history, it does so despite or even because of their metaphysical imperfection, further entrenching this view. In addressing this, I shall now examine the provenance of the female metaphysical imperfection in Aristotle and how contemporary debates about sex and gender fail to resolve it while losing what is of value in Aristotle.

² David L. Schindler, "Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 20, (1993): 203.

³ Schindler, "Catholic Theology, Gender," 204.

1.1. Aristotle and sexual difference

The knot of issues involved in unravelling the claim that the female is metaphysically imperfect traces back to Aristotle.⁴ Crucial is his distinction between substance and accident as primary and secondary categories of being, respectively.⁵ Substances exist in themselves. They are what a being is. If the substance changes, the thing ceases to be. Accidents exist in relation to substances, qualifying how substances exist, for instance, as small and red. Although certain accidents are essential to each substance, ontologically speaking they are derivative. They rely on substance. They do not concern what it means to be a thing of a certain kind. For Aristotle, substances evoke wonder, fuelling a desire to know a being's cause.⁶ This concerns not only what brings it into existence but its intelligible unity and purpose. This is Aristotle's fourfold model of material, formal, efficient and final causality.⁷ Here every substance is a composite of matter and substantial form or essence. Unlike aspects of Platonism, substantial forms for Aristotle do not exist in a separate ideal realm but inhere each being. It is form (properly speaking, final form) not matter, which determines the being's whole existence.⁸ Also substantial form is not static but the primary ontological category of act – the act of being something. Form is act vis-à-vis matter which exists in potency as to substantial form which, in turn, is actively potent towards matter. Accordingly, substantial form is the act that constitutes the whole substantial composite. The efficient cause of a substance is a substance which moves matter by introducing a new substantial form bringing about a new substance. With animals, the act of generation is such that the male contributes active substantial form as efficient and formal cause; the female contributes passive matter (not pure matter but matter informed with a lesser substantial form subsumed into the male's contribution of a higher form).⁹ The male principle is to be 'maker and mover'; the female that 'which is acted on and moved.'¹⁰ This aligns with Aristotle's account of the male-female difference. A male offspring is produced where form is perfectly actualised within matter; a female where it is imperfectly

⁴ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750BC-1250* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 119: Aristotle was the first 'to provide a comprehensive framework of the sex-polarity position.' This contrasts with Plato's 'sex-unity' position where sexual difference is insignificant because the soul is sexless. Sex pertains to appearance. *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁵ *Metaphysics*, IV.4.

⁶ *Metaphysics*, I.2.983a.10-25

⁷ Aristotle, *Physics*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. by P. H. Wicksteed and F. M. Cornford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), II.3; *Metaphysics*, V.2.

⁸ *Metaphysics*, VII.8.1032b1.

⁹ *Generation*, I.2.716a5-10; 2.4.738b20-23.

¹⁰ *Generation*, I.2.729b14-19.

actualised because of accidental conditions. The female is, for Aristotle, infamously, a ‘misbegotten’ or ‘deformed’ male.¹¹

With justification, many commentators see Aristotle’s female as simply a negative modification of an essentially male substantial form. This lies behind, for example, Thomas Laqueur’s distinction between a one-sex model and two-sex model.¹² Whereas the latter recognises an irreducible difference between the sexes, the former makes one sex normative and the other its variation. Laqueur argues Aristotle makes the male normative.¹³ Feminists argue this reflects social norms that subjugate women and underpin later social history.¹⁴

Aristotle’s position can be nuanced somewhat. Positively, sexual difference is linked to generative function. The male is ‘one which generates in another’; and, the female is ‘one which generates in itself.’¹⁵ Furthermore, male and female are not just causes of substantial existence (material, formal and efficient causes) but indispensable for final causality and the flourishing of the individual, society and species.¹⁶ This affirms a positive reciprocity between male and female necessary for generation. Accordingly, against the one-sex attribution, Sophia Connell argues that for Aristotle ‘there must be two sexes.’¹⁷ Nevertheless, the female remains ‘disabled and differently abled.’¹⁸ So, despite Connell’s claim, Aristotle offers a two-sex model derived from a more basic one-sex perspective.

This indicates a metaphysical ambiguity concerning whether the privation and resultant reciprocity that defines the female impacts human substance. Aristotle makes sexual difference more than merely accidental given its significance for generation. But this cannot entail a privation of substantial form which would yield a different being. Rather, using the notion of deficiency, Aristotle introduces a metaphysical vulnerability of substantial form to matter due to external, accidental forces.

This has two implications. First, it establishes an ambiguity regarding the priority of substance to accident. Accidental changes impact substances (form and matter), even if this is not a substantial

¹¹ *Generation*, II.3.737a25-30. Cf., *ST*, Ia.92.1.

¹² Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 6-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 28-33.

¹⁴ E.g. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 23-27.

¹⁵ *Generation*, I.2.716a15

¹⁶ *Generation*, II.3.731b16-732a12. Cf., *ST*, Ia.92.1 ad 1, where Aquinas follows Aristotle. For a defence of this, see Joseph Francis Hartel, *Femina Ut Imago Dei: In the Integral Feminism of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1993), 96-97.

¹⁷ Sophia M. Connell, *Aristotle on Female Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 266.

¹⁸ Connell, *Female Animals*, 291.

change. While this attributes to the female more metaphysical dignity than the accidental order, it remains less than that of substantial form. Secondly, it allows privation into the form-matter union which determines the female substance. This privation or deformity becomes the primary metaphysical measure of sexual difference.¹⁹ Though Aristotle affirms reciprocity between the sexes, it does not touch the core of being human.

The ambiguity here becomes more apparent when Aristotle considers the nature of difference itself in his treatise on metaphysics. He first distinguishes 'difference' from 'otherness'. The latter is purely extrinsic with little commonality between things other than existence (without Aquinas' sense of *esse*, Aristotle has an empty notion of being beyond substance). Difference, however, concerns variations regarding something shared between things.²⁰ The greater the unity they share the more intelligible their difference. Aristotle also employs the notion of contrariety to describe the greatest possible difference within the shared unity of a genus. It is complete-in-itself, marking the extreme end points of a series. Contraries are accidental modifications of substances.²¹ For each contrariety, one term is principle and the other its privation.²² Thus, for example, the hot-cold contrariety is more fully defined as hot-not(hot). Aristotle interprets this to mean the terms are not interdependent.²³ Some contraries, moreover, are mutually exclusive, admitting of no intermediaries. This arises where the presence of one contrary is always necessary in a substance and so excludes the other, for example, health or disease in an animal. Other contraries, where neither term need be present, encompass a spectrum of intermediaries between two extremes, such as hot and cold.

Although contraries apply to the accidental order, in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle extends it to the difference between species in the same genus. Thus, a horse and a human are contraries because different species of the genus animal.²⁴ This is problematic. It is not the most complete difference within the genus animal. Furthermore, the difference between two animal species is not one of privation. This out-of-character definition of contrariety tellingly precedes Aristotle's consideration of sexual difference which he affirms as a contrariety. He notes sexual difference accrues to animal

¹⁹ Cf., Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. C. Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165: 'Woman...in her share of substance, ...may as well not be as be.'

²⁰ *Metaphysics*, X.3.1054b20-30.

²¹ *Metaphysics*, XIV.1.

²² *Metaphysics*, X.4.1055b15-20. Also X.4.1055a33-36.

²³ Aristotle, *Categories*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. P. Cooke and Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), III.10.

²⁴ *Metaphysics*, X.8.1058a1-30.

nature essentially.²⁵ Hence, it cannot simply be accidental. This echoes how Aristotle says elsewhere that ‘male and female differ in respect of their *logos*...because the male is that which has the power to generate in another..., while the female is that which can generate in itself.’²⁶ Such a difference in function would suggest a difference in substantial form. Yet, this cannot be so for sexual difference. Accordingly, despite himself, Aristotle affirms the male-female difference as a contrariety at the level of accident.²⁷

Ultimately, this makes sexual difference metaphysically secondary. As Schindler observes, it ‘may affect the *physical* being of an animal, perhaps even radically, but it does not “enter into” its very essence....’²⁸ This is compounded by identifying sexual difference as a contrariety between a positive principle (male) and privation (female) with no reciprocity between them. Notably Aristotle does not classify sexual difference as a correlative. This is a difference where terms are reciprocally dependent on each other where this too concern accidents not substance.²⁹ This highlights how Aristotle’s metaphysics offers an insufficiently radical basis for difference. Differences are either extrinsic between substances of the same genus or between accidental variations of a substance. Aristotle offers ‘no possibility of having a truly *profound* difference that concerns the very *being* of things, but only the manner...in which a thing *appears*.’³⁰ Aristotle is, therefore, unable to affirm the substantial reality of female humanity as equal to but different from that of male. I shall return later in this chapter to see how Aristotle’s metaphysics can, via Balthasar’s metaphysics, be adjusted for an analogical notion of being that allows for a unity-in-difference affecting the whole substantial form.

1.2. Gender and sex in contemporary thought

I turn now to contemporary Western thought and the distinction between sex and gender.³¹ As we shall see, while this often sits critically to the Aristotelian legacy around sexual difference, it is both

²⁵ *Metaphysics*, X.9.1058a31–33.

²⁶ *Generation*, I.2.716a.20–25.

²⁷ *Metaphysics*, X.9.1058b22–24.

²⁸ D.C. Schindler, “Perfect Difference: Gender and the Analogy of Being”, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 43, (2016): 204.

²⁹ Aristotle, *Categories*, II.7.

³⁰ Schindler, “Perfect Difference,” 202–203.

³¹ The distinction is a matter of debate within feminist thought. Some see it as problematic, for example, Raia Prokhovnik, *Rational Woman* (London: Routledge, 1999); and, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999). John Money coined the distinction in psychology regarding transsexuality. See John Money, Joan G. Hampson, John Hampson, “An Examination of Some Basic Sexual Concepts: The Evidence of Human Hermaphroditism,” *Bulletin of The Johns Hopkins Hospital* 97, (1955): 301–319.

unable to resolve the difficulties with the latter while also forfeiting the metaphysical weight Aristotle wants to attribute to the generative act rooted in sexual difference.

Typically, sex concerns traits such as anatomical differences, and hormonal and chromosomal make-up; and gender relates to individual psychology, sexuality, social roles, cultural norms, and behavioural patterns. This distinction was adopted by feminists to challenge the hegemony of defining sexual difference based on empirically-observed traits asserted to be immutable that are in fact shaped by social and cultural norms. It lies behind Simone de Beauvoir's claim that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, woman.'³² For Beauvoir, this can appear natural, fuelling her ideological critique of any perceived inequality between male and female.³³ Alongside Beauvoir's view, the contemporary situation unveils a plurality of views. These can be considered broadly to be either essentialist or constructivist.

Essentialism has several meanings. It can be used pejoratively as the target of feminist critiques, or it can form the basis of feminist standpoints. A thoroughgoing essentialist position applies comprehensively to an individual's human nature, determining biology, psychology, behaviour, social role and so on. This leaves open which traits are normative. Thus, a biological essentialism is based on anatomy and/or genetic makeup. However, most feminist positions hold that while biological factors are determinative for sex, gender is the social interpretation of these biological traits. One such approach is gender essentialism or realism which identifies a particular trait that makes women (and men) members of a social kind (also known as kind essentialism).³⁴ This assumes women 'share some characteristic feature, experience, common condition or criterion that defines their gender and the possession of which makes some individuals women (as opposed to, say, men). *All* women are thought to differ from *all* men in this respect (or respects).'³⁵ What constitutes the defining property varies between thinkers. It can relate, for example, to how social conditioning defines women as subordinate to men;³⁶ psychological markers influenced by social stereotypes;³⁷ or, being sexually objectivised by men.³⁸ Certain feminist voices are critical insofar as this approach

³² Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 293. Cf., John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1896), 41-42.

³³ Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 15.

³⁴ Cf., Charlotte Witt, "What is Gender Essentialism?", in *Feminist Metaphysics*, ed. Charlotte Witt (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 13-14.

³⁵ Mari Mikkola, "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/feminism-gender/>.

³⁶ E.g., Sally Haslanger, "Ontology and Social Construction," *Philosophical Topics* 23, (1995): 95-125.

³⁷ E.g., Nancy Chodorow, *Reproducing Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1978).

³⁸ E.g., Catharine Mackinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989)

claims to speak for all women yet represents the viewpoint of a certain class of people, for example, white Western middle-class women.³⁹ This sense of essentialism does not seek after substantial form as a causal explanation, but what constitutes membership of a social kind. It concerns the accidental order of being. It does not, therefore, address, but begs, the question of being. It is often contrasted with gender nominalism.⁴⁰ This denies we can access the essence of properties, but instead groups individuals together based on abstract ideas we label in language based on perceived commonalities, but without claiming these attach to a real essence or its accidental properties.⁴¹

This brings us to constructivism. This challenges the notion that there are any essential attributes defining gender. Gender essentialism simply replaces previous biological reductionist views or social constructs of gender with new constructs of social kind.⁴² This critique is evidenced by Judith Butler who draws on, amongst other, Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. Butler holds that gender is wholly performative and constructed through 'stylized repetition of acts.'⁴³ Gender is 'a becoming...that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end.... [I]t is open to intervention and resignification.'⁴⁴ This entails a deconstructive phase which rejects gender essentialism as one form of oppressive constructivism to replace it with an approach that admits its constructed nature. Butler also claims biological sex is a construct and 'discursively produced'.⁴⁵ This takes aim at Aristotle's substantial form, judging that it imprisons the body from within via a constructed idea of the body imposed by external, albeit hidden, coercion.⁴⁶ She seeks to liberate human causal agency over human nature by dissociating it from any *a priori* claims. She proposes instead a pure relationality where male and female are defined only in relation to each other in an endless play of creativity.⁴⁷ Other feminists, however, question this approach, arguing that gender identity and sexual difference have an objective basis in the nature of things, even if this does not fully determine

³⁹ Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

⁴⁰ This has its roots in John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), III.6.2.

⁴¹ Cf., Natalie Stoljar, "Essence, Identity and the Concept of Woman," in *Philosophical Topics: Feminist Perspectives on Language, Knowledge and Reality* 23.2, (1996): 278.

⁴² Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'," *Praxis International* 11, (1991): 150–165.

⁴³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁶ Judith Butler, "Bodies That Matter," in *Engaging with Irigaray*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 141–73.

⁴⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22–33.

how gender is enacted within social contexts. Particularly noteworthy are those who, like Balthasar, root these differences in reproductive roles.⁴⁸

These tensions play out over whether sexual difference is binary, that is, exclusively male and female, and whether these are fixed from conception. In contemporary Western cultural discourse, even to speak of sexual difference is considered to have begged the question. Against this is pitted a plethora of gender identities that reflect different ways individuals relate to their bodies. This affirms sex and gender to be inherently malleable.⁴⁹ Yet, in a sign that this often masks an anti-essentialist essentialism, this is challenged by evidence ‘that sex goes far deeper than previously thought: biologically speaking, the brain “has sex” as do the kidneys.’⁵⁰

This concern about fixed binaries links to questions of transsexuality and intersex. Both are complex issues. Here, I take the former broadly to cover how individuals who experience their personal and cultural identity to be at variance with their bodily sex, and its associated behaviour and roles, have changed their sex by cultural, medical and/or technological means; a change, moreover, which is in several countries recognised and protected by law. By intersex, I understand individuals who are born with biological traits of both sexes. For example, there are individuals who display typically female anatomy yet who possess the male XY chromosomes; and, those who appear typically male who have XXY chromosomes. Furthermore, there are individuals who have exhibited ambiguous genitalia of both sexes at birth, and in some cases undergone surgical reassignment to one sex. Intersex has led some scientists to argue that biological sex exists along a spectrum and is ‘a cluster concept’ where a person’s sex is determined by exhibiting enough features deemed typically male or female.⁵¹ This implicitly affirms, however, two normative ends of the spectrum. How intersex and transsexuality are interpreted varies. To sketch the extremes, they can be taken as proof of how nature is inherently malleable and so support constructivism.⁵² Alternatively, where sexual difference is understood to be most perfectly manifest as either male or female, they are considered as a defect.⁵³

⁴⁸ E.g., Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 172; and, Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40.

⁴⁹ Cf., Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 217–18.

⁵⁰ Margaret H. McCarthy, “Gender Ideology And The Humanum,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 43, (2016): 289

⁵¹ For an overview, see Alison Stone, *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 44-46.

⁵² McCarthy, “Gender Ideology,” 287, refers to this as the ‘natural argument’.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 287.

These issues open a broader set of questions regarding human nature and reality itself.⁵⁴ Thus, on modernity's understanding, material reality follows certain immutable scientific laws accessible to human reason. Human nature is divided between matter and an individual self-consciousness construed as rational autonomous adult freedom which transcends material reality such that we can understand the laws of nature and shape it as rational individuals and as part of society and state. Based on so-called post-modernity, however, this view is challenged. In the place of reason and fixed laws, reality is characterised principally by a depth of feeling, volition, and creativity to shape material reality beyond the bounds of mere reason and natural laws. This combines a metaphysical materialism and nominalism which asserts that there is no underlying essential and meaning-saturated reality. Meaning is a function of the human power to define things and manipulate material reality through cultural, social and technological means, including our bodies. However much they appear opposed, these perspectives affirm that the only abiding reality is the individual's power to manipulate matter. What is essential about being human comes down to the will's freedom to be unencumbered, other than by encumbrances freely chosen. This is, therefore, oriented against aspects of human reality prior to individual freedom. These are 'factitious inequalities' to be overcome since they place unacceptable limits on the individual's self-constructing freedom.⁵⁵ This fuels a cultural mission indiscriminately to flatten reality, raising the spectre of 'one vast war of all against all' to allow everyone to exercise 'the (supposed) universal equal right to self-construction.'⁵⁶ This regards all beings as 'essentially *undifferentiated monads*.'⁵⁷

Margaret McCarthy elaborates regarding the constitutive human relationships. Against them is pitted the view 'that there is a "more natural" state (the "state of nature") according to which we are really at bottom nonspeaking, apolitical, not-born, and androgynous, individuals for whom "it is good to be alone." This turns what really is a construct – the abstract "individual" – into a new natural, so as to turn what is really natural – constitutive relations – into a "construct," beginning with the reconfiguration of these relations on consensual terms.'⁵⁸ Here individuals are insulated from any relationships that lay *a priori* claims on them. Even when framed as 'pure relations', such

⁵⁴ For this characterisation of modernity and postmodernity, see Taylor, *Secular Age*, 550-574; and, John Milbank, "A Closer Walk on the Wild Side: Some Comments on Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22.1, (2009): 89-104.

⁵⁵ Adrian J. Walker and Rachel M. Coleman, "The Saving Difference," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 42, (2015): 185

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁸ McCarthy, "Gender Ideology," 294.

relationships are unmoored from nature or being.⁵⁹ Familial relationships are repurposed ‘along more democratic (consensual) terms....’⁶⁰ This is witnessed, for example, in the dissociation of sexual intercourse from commitments we owe others, reproduction, and the claims of children. Indeed, generation is placed on an egalitarian footing since ‘even unions incapable in principle of generating children will enact a new form of kinship by reintroducing children to sex through the “deliberate construction” of assisted reproductive technology.’⁶¹ This rejects the parent-child relationship as prior to choice. In a final twist, however, this turns children, understood as de facto adults, against parents (including adults who have obtained children through technological assistance) and, more radically, as explored in the previous chapter, against their own status as children. Thus the ‘child’s “war with all that gives him birth” will now be “won” (however counterintuitive this may).’⁶² The underlying risk of such unfettered constructivism is that it turns the individual against itself and children against themselves, heralding nihilism and anti-natalism.

The above belies the radical nature of difference itself. This seems strange given the emphasis on diversity advocated by post-modern constructivism. Indeed, such a perspective echoes Jacques Derrida’s notion of *différance*.⁶³ This affirms not only irreducible difference, but an endless deferral of meaning in language where words reference other words yet no foundational meaning is attained. Such deferral of meaning underpins a wider deconstruction in the name of affirming difference, informing Derrida’s critique of how traditional metaphysics is structured around binary oppositions such as perfect-imperfect, act-potency, form-matter, male-female.⁶⁴ As Schindler argues, however, culturally this witnesses to ‘a confusion and an ambivalence toward difference’.⁶⁵ The ambivalence arises from how diversity is lauded only at the surface. No difference we have not chosen ourselves can be countenanced. To escape such demands, difference is trivialised into an endless possibility of equally valid fungible choices, motivating the rejection of so-called binary thinking. This dovetails with Schindler’s claim over cultural confusion, for to reject binary thinking entrenches a new binary, namely, that non-binary is good and binary is bad. The new binary is unacknowledged given the refusal to affirm any fundamental difference. This is done for the sake of promoting endless yet abstract and content-less difference at the expense of concrete differences.

⁵⁹ Cf., Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 58.

⁶⁰ McCarthy, “Gender Ideology,” 294.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 295.

⁶³ Jacques Derrida, “Cogito et histoire de la folie,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 68, (1963): 460-494.

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

⁶⁵ Schindler, “Perfect Difference,” 196.

Like Aristotle, the contemporary situation reflects an inability to affirm differences that pertain to what exists-in-itself. Unlike Aristotle, however, the contemporary regime of difference-at-any-price denies any underlying notion of substantial form which, for Aristotle, roots difference at the accidental level and makes difference intelligible. Instead, it lionizes Aristotle's sense of mere otherness between things that have no other commonality than that they participate in process of becoming. Against this backdrop, I now examine how Balthasar's metaphysics supports an alternative view, yet not without confronting Balthasar's own problematic treatment of sexual difference.

2. Balthasar's Dramatic Approach to Human Nature

To develop this, I turn to Balthasar's dramatic anthropology in *TD2* and *TD3*. This follows the discussion of finite freedom explored in the previous chapter and is contiguous with Balthasar's account of how being appears according to a concrete primal *Gestalt* examined in chapter one. As we saw, each person is first welcomed into this *Gestalt*, and reflects it within their spiritual nature's openness to being, when they awaken as a child to self-consciousness through its parents' love. Human freedom is, at its origin, already concretely formed with the self-transcending capacity freely to receive and respond to being as gift, not principally a matter of choice, but via concrete relations of interdependence whereby the spirit is ecstatically engaged by and with others.⁶⁶ This establishes a positive tension between each person's freedom and their dependence on others' freedom. Here the *a priori* gifted capacity of the human heart's attunement to being's beauty 'passes over into a dramatic interplay of dialogical freedom.'⁶⁷

Given this, questions about humanity's essential nature are inseparable from our dramatic participation in *esse*: 'we are caught up in the drama, we cannot remove ourselves from it or even conceive ourselves apart from it.'⁶⁸ We can ask about human essence only in the midst of this 'dramatic performance of existence.'⁶⁹ Balthasar here adapts a Scholastic axiom: "*Agere sequitur esse*" also requires "*esse sequitur agere*".⁷⁰ Not only does human action follow and participate in *esse*, but *esse* only subsists in and manifests itself as the actions of beings. The truth about human essence, therefore, is not a determined fixed static reality accessed directly in a conceptually complete way.⁷¹ Rather, the dramatic discovery of human nature occurs within the *Gestalt* into

⁶⁶ Cf., *GL1*, 21.

⁶⁷ *TD2*, 25.

⁶⁸ *TD2*, 335.

⁶⁹ *TD2*, 335.

⁷⁰ *TD2*, 11.

⁷¹ *TD2*, 12.

which we are born and which we share with others. It is presumed, yet not given comprehensively all at once.⁷² This participation within form's excess obviates the suggestion that Balthasar places human drama outside being's appearance as *Gestalt*.⁷³ Rather, this primal *Gestalt* is the ontological medium that enables human freedom to be enacted according to its self-transcending spiritual openness to *esse* within its concrete material limits.

The upshot is that human nature is open-endedly 'undefinable.'⁷⁴ This does not preclude saying anything about being human. Rather, affirming the medieval view of humanity as a microcosm of creation open to God, Balthasar follows both Aquinas and Nicholas of Cusa for whom such indefinability reflects humanity's commensurability with being's ever-greater reality which paradoxically mediates the immediate human relationship to God.⁷⁵ Rooting human indefinability in being's excess underpins Balthasar's dramatic anthropology. 'Man...cannot be defined by anything outside of him; he can and must define *himself*.'⁷⁶ This occurs, however, only within the dramatic *Gestalt* of human existence such that humans define themselves according to the limits of their nature's freedom. Hence, Balthasar cautions against trying to escape concrete encounters in the world into an abstract transcendental self. He also challenges a dialectical view of such encounters that makes the self 'the product of a prepersonal process.'⁷⁷ Balthasar rejects, therefore, a Hegelianism that equates 'the empirical I with the absolute I in some inconceivable point that would then be responsible for the whole upward movement of the process and...coincide with it.'⁷⁸ For Balthasar, the paradox of created spirit is to be 'simultaneously fully realized in itself and yet also characterised by a potentiality whereby it realizes itself by ongoing experiences of the other and of itself...'⁷⁹ Even this must not be absolutized. Humans as persons are not identical with their paradoxical nature which, instead, points beyond itself to God. In the 'dramatic dialogue with God,' God causes humans to encounter God's ultimate definition of being human.⁸⁰ This defines humanity as a positive mystery that reflects and is oriented to the ever-greater mystery of God: 'man is *more*

⁷² Cf., *TD2*, 11.

⁷³ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 77, claims Balthasar leaves the aesthetic form behind in his notion of drama. Schindler, "'A Very Critical Response'", 76-77n.9 notes that Milbank misquotes Balthasar's text. Schindler responds 'drama does not go beyond *form*...but only beyond passive, detached *spectation* of form, which is why drama "expands aesthetics into something new,"...."yet continuous with itself."' Cf., *TD1*, 17. Accepting this, I argue Balthasar steps outside the dramatic character of form vis-à-vis sexual difference.

⁷⁴ *TD2*, 335.

⁷⁵ *TD2*, 354-355.

⁷⁶ *TD2*, 341.

⁷⁷ *ExT4*, 21.

⁷⁸ *ExT4*, 21

⁷⁹ *ExT4*, 23

⁸⁰ *TD2*, 343.

than what can be included in a conceptually clear definition.⁸¹ To be a creature that must freely define oneself against a backdrop of ever-greater divine mystery, therefore, becomes a matter of whether one freely receives oneself and one's openness to *esse* as divine gift to be shared with others.

3. Polarities of Human Nature

In *TD2*, against the backdrop of this dramatic understanding of human essence, Balthasar identifies three polarities that underpin how humans are simultaneously indefinable, capable of defining themselves, and receive their true definition from God as a gift shared with others. These polarities are: body and spirit, male and female, and, the individual and community. Balthasar claims that humans exist according to this 'threefold rhythm.'⁸² Though constants of human nature, they do not solve the human mystery. Rather, 'they render it more profound and more pressing. In all three dimensions man seems to be built according to a polarity, obliged to engage in reciprocity, always seeking complementarity and peace in the other pole. And for that very reason he is pointed beyond his whole polar structure.'⁸³ My focus here is on the male-female polarity. In *TD2*, Balthasar treats the polarity of sexual difference as a whole whereas in *TD3* he considers the distinctiveness of male and female humanity, which I shall return to later.

From the outset, we can query whether Balthasar actually offers a dramatic account of sexual difference. He engages, first, with the Genesis accounts of creation, judging them to contain 'much legendary wisdom on the part of mankind, purified of mythical bias,' and 'a phenomenology of the sexual [realm].'⁸⁴ Secondly, Balthasar considers how sexual difference has been interpreted within the history of Western thought as related to material or spiritual reality. Regarding the latter, Balthasar criticises the tendency of equating the male with the spiritual realm, and the female with material nature. He rejects the 'misogynistic utterance of the Fathers and Scholastics...'⁸⁵ This approach, however, is removed from a dramatic account rooted in the encounter between actual humans.

This provokes the criticism that Balthasar claims *a priori* comprehensive knowledge of what sexual difference is. Beattie, for example, contrasts Balthasar with Luce Irigaray's claim that, because female subjectivity in the Western tradition is largely a male construct, 'we have only the vaguest of

⁸¹ *TD2*, 345.

⁸² *TD2*, 410.

⁸³ *TD2*, 355.

⁸⁴ *TD2*, 368.

⁸⁵ *TD2*, 367.

ideas'.⁸⁶ This echoes a broader epistemic position held by some of Balthasar's critics, namely, the unknowability of essences. This, in a broadly Kantian lineage, emphasises the *a priori* limits of human knowing whereby we gain at best a partial grasp of partial realities, but cannot grasp the whole of a reality or reality as a whole. It can be pitted against, for example, a Hegelian perspective which subsumes partial viewpoints into an overarching whole at the risk of an ultimately abstract and univocal view of reality. Indeed, Ben Quash argues this is what Balthasar does in his dramatic view of reality, applying a so-called overarching epic perspective towards reality that situates itself outside the drama.⁸⁷ Kilby follows Quash in accusing Balthasar of adopting a 'God's eye view' above human drama.⁸⁸ These critiques, however, tacitly admit we can grasp a notion of sexual difference as a whole. Implicit in Beattie's words, for instance, is that she knows what the vaguest of ideas of sexual difference as whole refers to from the outset. It would be better to affirm, therefore, that it is possible to have a notion of sexual difference as whole which, nevertheless, is not comprehensively mapped out. Here Balthasar and his critics would find common ground by affirming together that sexual difference is a mystery before which we must exercise epistemic humility. Nonetheless, we can affirm that the exploration of sexual difference does include grasping it as a whole from the start, albeit as a whole that needs to be continually reencountered. Here the debate would focus on the nature of whole grasped from the first. In the present discussion, I use the prism of the fruitfulness of sexual difference to this end. To deny even an initial grasp of the whole, however, is to claim that partial knowledge of parts trumps an ability to engage with something as a whole even if it requires further discovery.⁸⁹ Furthermore, such a wholesale denial begs the question that human reason operates according to *a priori* limits which prevent us from knowing something-in-itself as a whole. To assert such limits is already to claim more than those limits allow.

For Balthasar, sexual difference, as a polarity of human nature, is not an abstract *a priori* limit but a concrete condition of human existence. As with the other polarities, they are presumed and encountered within every human life. They are no mere external objects to be investigated by the subject. They constitute the subject's capacity for perception, action and thought. We approach these polarities from within, even as they constitute us from without, and as we seek to articulate them more fully. This restates the previous chapter's conclusion that the act of self-consciousness is

⁸⁶ Tina Beattie, "A Man and Three Women," 98.

⁸⁷ Quash, *Drama of History*, 137-155, argues this epic tendency arises from Balthasar's static understanding of the analogy of being. See, *ibid.*, 165-195. Cf., Schindler, *DST*, 21-25, which critiques an earlier article by Quash that makes the same point. Cf., Quash, "Drama and the Ends of Modernity," 139-171. As highlighted in chapter one, I disagree with Quash's assessment of Balthasar's analogy of being. However, I agree that Balthasar displays epic tendencies regarding sexual difference. This, however, falls short of his metaphysics.

⁸⁸ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 12, 113.

⁸⁹ This echoes Schindler's response to Kilby's criticism of Balthasar. Schindler, "A Very Critical Response," 75.

awoken from beyond itself, making it constitutionally open to discover more about the inexhaustible depths of the beings beyond it. Moreover, the self-conscious subject is transformed by what it discovers outside itself thereby fulfilling its ecstatic provenance. This dramatic process of ongoing discovery via participating in a concrete reality that is inexhaustibly more-than-can-be-grasped applies to sexual difference.

That said, regarding sexual difference Balthasar problematically steps outside the dramatic concrete form of human existence. This is apparent in his assertion of an irreducible difference and mutuality between male and female.

The male body is male throughout, right down to each cell of which it consists, and the female body is utterly female; and this is also true of their whole empirical experience and ego-consciousness. At the same time both share an identical human nature, but at no point does it protrude, neutrally, beyond the sexual difference, as if to provide neutral ground for mutual understanding.... The human, in the completed creation, is a “dual unity”, “two distinct but inseparable realities, each fulfilling the other and both ordained to an ultimate unity that we cannot as yet envisage”⁹⁰

Positively, this passage articulates that sexual difference characterises human nature as a whole yet is only manifested concretely in given individuals. As Kilby notes, ostensibly this champions sexual difference’s embodied reality and eschews abstraction.⁹¹ It militates against identifying sexual difference with one aspect of human nature. ‘[T]he human person – who is concretely male and female – is (and remains) incarnate through and through. It is neither possible nor legitimate to split him schizophrenically into two halves, one biological and the other spiritual.’⁹² Balthasar insists no metaphysical polarity can define sexual difference.⁹³ It encompasses humanity’s whole embodied spiritual existence in openness to divine reality.⁹⁴ Negatively, Balthasar simply asserts a comprehensively biological and psychological essentialist distinction between the sexes without explaining how this avoids splitting human nature. This sits uneasily with Balthasar’s claim that we cannot give ‘a conclusive definition of the essence of the male and the female. We can only approach the male/female polarity that pervades the entire living creation by allowing each pole to

⁹⁰ *TD2*, 365-366.

⁹¹ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 124-125. Kilby immediately questions the credibility of Balthasar’s affirmation.

⁹² *ExT5*, 150.

⁹³ *TD2*, 368.

⁹⁴ *TD2*, 370. Echoing Przywara, Balthasar affirms that the relationship God and sexual difference is one of ‘in-and-above’.

shed light on the other.⁹⁵ Balthasar hints at a tension by admitting the ‘extreme difficulty of giving a precise account of the significance and implications of the sexual difference....’⁹⁶

More promisingly, farther on in *TD2*, Balthasar delineates the sexes based on their mutual illumination and interdependence as analogous to, and paradigmatic of, interpersonal relationships.

Balthasar states:

man is always in communion with his counterimage, woman, and yet never reaches her. The converse is true of woman. If we take this man/woman relationship as a paradigm, it also means that the human “I” is always searching for the “thou”, and actually finds it..., without ever being able to take possession of it in its otherness. Not only because the freedom of the “thou” cannot be mastered by the “I” using any superior transcendental grasp – since, in its proper context, all human freedom only opens up to absolute, divine freedom – but also because this impossibility is “enfleshed” in the diverse and complementary constitution of the sexes.⁹⁷

This affirms that the male-female difference is a reciprocity which safeguards their abiding mystery. Indeed, their reciprocity depends on their asymmetry. This represents an ‘integral sexual complementarity.’⁹⁸ This differs from a ‘fractional sexual complementarity’ which treats male and female as two incomplete halves of a single whole.⁹⁹ Balthasar explains this ontologically. Sexual difference denotes how human nature “‘is dual, without multiplying the unity by two; it is simply two poles of a single reality, two diverse presences of a single being, two *entia* in a single *esse*, one existence in two lives; but by no means two different fragments of a whole, to be fitted together like a puzzle....”¹⁰⁰ Man and woman are fully human yet differently whereby they encompass human nature as single essential unity characterized by irreducible difference and interdependence that expresses humanity’s contingent nature and opens to God.¹⁰¹ As it stands, however, the above merely asserts difference. For a fully dramatic account, Balthasar links this mutual illumination of sexes to their joint fruitfulness.

⁹⁵ *TD3*, 292-293.

⁹⁶ *ExT5*, 149.

⁹⁷ *TD2*, 366.

⁹⁸ Prudence Allen, “Integral Sexual Complementarity and the Theology of Communion,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 17, (1990): 540.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 540. Cf. Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, trans. Michelle K. Borrás (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 116-121.

¹⁰⁰ *TD2*, 366, quoting Albert Frank-Duquesne, *Création et procréation* (Paris: Les Edition de Minuit, 1951), 42-46.

¹⁰¹ *TD2*, 369.

4. Knowing Sexual Difference by its Fruitfulness

In *TL2*, Balthasar qualifies his earlier view of sexual difference in *TD2*. Rather than asserting ‘the original distance and relation between man and woman’ as ‘the primordial phenomenon’, we must attend also to their ‘organic *and* personal fruitfulness.’¹⁰² I will return to the distinction between organic and personal fruitfulness later. For now, the focus on fruitfulness emphasises the point mentioned above: that we grasp the polarities of human nature from within through dramatic enactment. Balthasar specifies this in *TL1* via an analogy between the subject-object union in the act of knowledge and the union of masculine and feminine humanity. In each case, the two poles can be considered in relative isolation in their inclination to union. However, ‘[t]he union itself is a new, third thing in which the purpose of these inclinations is truly unveiled for the first time.’¹⁰³ This transformative disclosure of the parts through union involves a reciprocal notion of causality. Thus, regarding sexual difference, the union of feminine and masculine is presupposed as that which orientates them to each other. Yet, this union and its fruit are only effected in their actual encounter. Here the effect (union and its fruit) is a cause (discloses and fulfils) of its cause (the constituent parts). Echoing final causality’s importance to Aristotle, the whole is inchoately anticipated as the condition of the integrity of the parts; and, yet this whole is only fully manifested in the parts, their transformative encounter, and its fruit. The analogy with the act of knowledge, however, must be qualified. The male-female union is not simply between subject and object, but between two subjects who are also distinctive objects to each other that represent different ways of being the same nature. Their union, moreover, brings a wholly new human into existence. While this may seem self-evident, it entails the wholly new event of the birth of a unique person who exceeds its parents as gift beyond their self-giving in its relationship to God.

The fruitfulness of human sexual difference can be further specified. I consider three observations made by Balthasar. First, the relationship between the sexes is one ‘that has all fruitfulness *within* it, and not *in addition to it*.’¹⁰⁴ There is a completeness and perfection to sexual difference’s fruitfulness. Yet it is not self-enclosed but intrinsically exceeds itself in its fruit, namely, a new living spiritual being. The birth of a child reveals that the relationship between the sexes encompasses all fruitfulness, therefore, only by exceeding itself into the relationship between parents and child. The parent-child relationship is both fruit and has ‘all fruitfulness’ within it insofar as it brings and nurtures a child into existence and self-conscious freedom. The horizontal, asymmetrical and

¹⁰² *TL2*, 60-61.

¹⁰³ *TL1*, 61.

¹⁰⁴ *TD2*, 382.

reciprocal relationship between a child's biological parents, which is rooted in their sexual difference, thus yields a vertical, asymmetrical and reciprocal relationship between the parents and child. The latter's asymmetry is distinguished from the former because of the child's utter dependence. Moreover, the parent-child relationship concerns not merely the conception, gestation, and birth of a child but also the child's awakening to self-consciousness as an embodied spirit open to *esse* in fragile dependence on others' love.

In addition, therefore, to the three polarities mentioned above (body-soul, male-female, individual-community), this denotes a fourth polarity, namely, child-parent. Balthasar implicitly treats this in the individual-community polarity. This, however, remains too abstract. The child-parent relationship, by contrast, is the concrete beginning of the drama of existence for each person. As Balthasar states, 'the child is born, not into an abstraction called "humanity", but into the supremely concrete reality of a maternal, paternal, and fraternal love.... Abstraction (in the usual sense) is even less appropriate here; the "essence" of man unfolds for the child only in a communion of love...'¹⁰⁵ The child-parent polarity concretely grounds and manifests the dramatic enactment of the other three polarities. That said, human sexual difference acts as a crucial hinge in the convergence of the body-soul and individual-community polarities in the child-parent relationship. As Balthasar says, 'the man/woman relationship can stand as a paradigm of that community dimension which characterizes man's entire nature.'¹⁰⁶ This paradigmatic community-character of sexual difference applies foremost to how its fruitfulness is manifested in bringing a child into fully self-conscious existence.

Secondly, Balthasar observes that the perfect fruitfulness of human sexual difference is 'conditioned'.¹⁰⁷ This is most apparent in its dependence on the body and sharing male and female fruitfulness. More fully, it refers the fruitfulness of sexual difference to the ontological difference discussed in chapter one. This stresses, first, how such fruitfulness is conditioned according to the essential form of human nature as embodied living spirit. Secondly, it emphasises how human sexual fruitfulness participates in *esse* as divine gift, thereby enacting the conditioned fruitfulness of the 'triadic character of worldly being.'¹⁰⁸ This concerns how all beings are to some extent co-constitutive because they share in *esse*. This affirms a closer level of intimacy and difference between all beings than both Aristotle and contemporary postmodernist constructivism envisage because each being's difference from others is rooted in the unity of *esse*'s superabundant actuality.

¹⁰⁵ *TL2*, 178.

¹⁰⁶ *TD2*, 363.

¹⁰⁷ *E*, 57.

¹⁰⁸ *TL2*, 37.

Such co-constitutive intimacy still varies, however, according to how extrinsic or intrinsic the relationships between beings are and the degree to which they actively mediate *esse* to each other. The fruitfulness of sexual difference discloses that the greatest degree of such intrinsically fruitful mediation occurs not simply between beings who share the same nature, but who generatively share a single nature in different ways. I return to this in the next section.

Thirdly, if the perfect and conditioned fruitfulness of sexual difference is to be fully human in communicating *esse*'s fruitfulness, it is both an organic/sexual and spiritual/personal fruitfulness. Organic/sexual fruitfulness coincides with how *esse* subsists in humans specifically as embodied, living, animal beings; and, spiritual/personal fruitfulness with how *esse* subsists in humans specifically as spiritual beings. Even if inseparable, these are nonetheless distinct. Before considering this, however, I examine first the metaphysical implications of identifying sexual difference, its fruitfulness, and the child-parent relationship with how *esse* subsists as human being.

5. Metaphysical Perfection of Sexual Difference

As considered above, Balthasar sees human sexual difference as two different ways of being the same kind of living spiritual embodied being. He does not consider this systematically. Accordingly, I engage with D.C Schindler's treatment of this question as congruent with Balthasar's thought. Schindler offers a phenomenological study of life, highlighting how the substantial form of a living being transcends its material being, enabling that organism to grow, reproduce, learn, etc. This greater transcendence of living form, however, is not separate from matter but manifested within matter as a greater unity-in-difference. Thus, the greater transcendence of form effects a greater integration between form and matter in living beings. This integrated view of form and matter echoes Balthasar's sense of *Gestalt* as a concrete whole. Accordingly, an individual living organism, in its vitality, is always more than just a mere instance of a universal essence. Schindler calls this the 'supra-individuality of the living individual.'¹⁰⁹ Echoing Balthasar's focus on fruitfulness, Schindler associates the transcendence of organic animal form in and beyond matter decisively with reproduction and nurture. These display both a greater level of transcendence of form over matter and a greater integration in that parents actively mediate the living form to their offspring within material reality. The supra-individuality of reproduction and nurture is also disclosed in the need for more than one progenitor. Thus, 'both means and ends are "supra-individual"; reproduction is the giving rise to super-individuality supra-individually....'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Schindler, "Perfect Difference," 209.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

This transforms mere reproduction, which, in principle, does not require sexually distinct individuals, as with many plants, into a single activity shared jointly by two co-agents that are different but correlated to each other. For animals (including humans), male and female in their co-dependence mediate the transcendence of living form within material being where form's vertical transcendence is manifested in their horizontal difference and relationship. Sexual difference is a 'dual unity' that encompasses the transcendence of animal substantial form. Schindler calls this different way of being the whole a 'mode' or 'modality' of substantial form.¹¹¹ Hence, sexual difference does not divide the species' unity. This is no accidental modification but entirely coincides with the essential form that defines a substance.

Schindler understands this modality of substantial living form as the most comprehensive of differences in a given unity and so, as explored earlier, a contrariety. Beyond Aristotle, however, Schindler argues this is no accident nor does it have a form-privation structure. Rather, the way the sexes mediate, in a single shared act, the transcendence of living form in generation and nurture entails a different relationship between contraries. Male and female are 'asymmetrically related..., ordered to each other reciprocally and from their very core; they are not a positive agent and a negative patient, but two differently positive, correlated agents in a single activity... [T]he genders are "supra-individual" from the ground up, reciprocally *for* one another, both as an expression of the immanent transcendence of form in living being.'¹¹² Although Schindler does not say so, this applies Aristotle's notion of correlatives, again in non-Aristotelian fashion, to substantial form. This corrects contrariety's form-privation model so that the extremes are reciprocally dependent. It also circumvents the idea that the female is the privative pole in the male-female relationship. Or, indeed, that there is a privative pole at all. This effects a metaphysical reversal. Rather than applying abstract notions of contrariety and correlative to sexual difference, it takes the concrete difference of sexual difference as disclosing something definitive about difference itself. This yields a reworked notion of difference that Schindler calls a 'substantial contrariety' meaning 'two positive and correlative ways of being a (living) substance' where they represent the greatest and most complete difference.¹¹³ Here the sexes do not divide human nature but encompass it wholly yet differently in interdependence. They are able to effect a union greater than the sum of its parts which thereby discloses more fully the difference between the sexes.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 221.

¹¹² Ibid., 212.

¹¹³ Ibid., 225.

I raise two issues with Schindler's presentation thus far. First, while sexual difference as a substantial contrariety is comprised of two extremes, this twoness is oriented to a third, namely, a new being who expresses the immanent transcendence of the same living form. This reveals a more complex pattern of relationship between a horizontal substantial contrariety (sexual difference) and a vertical substantial contrariety (parents and child). To be deemed a contrariety, and so encompass the extremes of a difference that applies to the transcendent unity of a substantial living form, this vertical contrariety needs to apply to the difference between two biological parents and their child. It does not encompass the extreme concrete limit simply to speak of adult and child; an adult who acts as a parent and a child they care for; one biological but absent parent and their child; or one biological parent who cares for their child. While these participate in the extreme difference-in-unity of a contrariety, they are intelligible based on a concrete form of that contrariety, namely, the unity-in-difference of sexually correlated adult progenitors and their child. This echoes Balthasar's sense of 'the supremely concrete reality of a maternal, paternal, and fraternal love.'¹¹⁴ That said, if everyone, for Balthasar, is fundamentally a child, and, indeed, should integrate such childlikeness into adulthood, then this vertical contrariety is not defined by mutually exclusive extremes. It is not the case that one is either a child or a parent. Rather, everyone, parents included, is a child whose origin is ultimately from God albeit mediated by human parents. Accepting, therefore, that no one can dispense with being a child opens the vertical parent-child contrariety to God, who as the source of everyone's being is the extreme limit that transcends child and parent, without, however, undermining the concrete parent-child contrariety. Echoing the discussion about non-biological parents in chapter two, this suggests that the perfection of the parent-child contrariety can be emulated by any relationships of fostering care between adults and children so long as each child is acknowledged as divine gift mediated by sexual fruitfulness and welcomed in love.

Secondly, because Schindler treats sexual/gender difference as a contrariety, he concludes there can be no third gender or infinite number of genders. He does, however, affirm the '*empirical observation*' that individuals can exhibit 'a coincidence of male and female traits, each of which logically make sense only as the contrary of the other.'¹¹⁵ That Schindler stresses its empirical nature suggests such intersex be restricted to the accidental order. But this contravenes his argument thus far. Rather, it is better to affirm any number of combinations of male and female at the level of an individual's substantial form, yet always within the concrete limits set by the extreme boundaries of sexual difference. Sexual difference is, therefore, a type of contrariety admitting intermediaries. This

¹¹⁴ TL2, 178.

¹¹⁵ Schindler, "Perfect Difference," 211n.37.

makes intersex as a modality of human substantial form. While accepting, therefore, Schindler's statement that each person learns about 'the *other* gender best by being true to one's own gender...and each gender is most liberated in its own specificity in the presence of others who authentically live their own'; this can also occur within a single individual in whom a distinct coincidence of male and female modalities occur.¹¹⁶ This offers a different perspective on Schindler's observation that we 'become more universally human the more fully and completely we live our distinctive masculinity or femininity.'¹¹⁷ Any individual by acting out their masculine modality comes closer to the feminine modality as expressed both within and outside them in others. Conversely, by acting out their own femininity they come closer to the masculinity that is within them and outside them in others. In principle, this also provides a context to situate the different but related question of transsexuality. Schindler, however, does not hold this position. For him, like Balthasar, humans are either male or female. This risks, however, replacing Aristotle's female as misbegotten with intersex. I reject this. The difficulty, however, is that, on a strict Aristotelian basis, contraries that admit intermediaries concern non-necessary properties. We could just assert that intersex simply requires we adjust the notion of substantial contrariety to fit the concrete reality. This, however, is insufficiently moored to being. Another way to address this is to affirm that substance has a non-necessary core in its dependence on *esse*. Such non-necessity would then attach to any modality of substance, be it an extreme limit or an intermediary.

This returns us to Schindler's account. As a modality that applies to substances, sexual difference cannot be rooted in essence/substantial form. Rather, Schindler locates such modality of substance in *esse*. As he explains, '*esse* concerns the particular form that every form in a thing takes, which is to say the modality or way of being of a substance and everything in it. Hence, we see why it is appropriate to associate gender metaphysically with *esse*: *esse* is a distinct mode of the essence that bears on everything in it....'¹¹⁸ Sexual difference, therefore, finds its metaphysical home in the quasi-formal pattern of *esse* – the creative reciprocal letting be whose actuality is permeated by both activity and receptivity. This explains how sexual difference applies to the whole substance of human nature without altering or dividing it. Sexual difference is communicated to and manifested in every level of human existence: its living spiritual form and, then, through this form, in the accidental order and material reality. Hence, no human attribute can be exclusively attributed to a single sex. Rather, each sex exhibits such attributes in their distinctive way, something I examine in a later section.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 220-1.

Schindler's association of sexual difference with the mode of *esse* as it subsists as the modality of living substantial form makes it analogous to personhood as we have explored it in Balthasar. Hence, 'personhood is...the perfection of the very thing that causes gender difference, namely, the transcendence of form.'¹¹⁹ Like personhood, sexual difference transcends nature from within nature. Also like personhood, sexual difference unveils the pattern of *esse* within a single nature as creative, self-transcending reciprocal letting be. Sexual difference is, therefore, like a 'who' that possesses and enacts the transcendence of its nature in relation to other sexed individuals of the same nature. As Schindler comments, with an eye to contemporary gender debates, the transcendence of human spiritual nature vis-à-vis the body does not divide gender as construct from sex as biological reality since this vertical transcendence constitutes sexual difference and discloses itself within embodied sex. The greater transcendence of human spiritual life means that gender is expressed not just biologically, but in the realm of personal freedom, and social and cultural interaction.

Given this analogy, Schindler argues sexual difference is a metaphysical principle of perfect difference per se. This draws together the strands of his argument: he applies contrariety, as the most perfect of differences within a given unity, not just to the unity of substantial form but the highest and most transcendent form, namely, substantial spiritual living form. This unity-in-difference is, moreover, located beyond substantial nature altogether in the perfect actuality of *esse*. Sexual difference applies, therefore, to *esse*'s unity which is prior to substance as the source of all being. Echoing Balthasar's metaphysics, Schindler holds, moreover, that because sexual difference is that which gives *esse* subsistence in living animal beings it is not derivative, but jointly ultimate with substantial form.¹²⁰

Sexual difference is, therefore, a fundamental metaphysical principle of perfect difference because it fully reveals the analogy of being's unity-in-difference as encapsulated in the relationship between *esse* and essence. To clarify, it is not merely an instance of how *esse* subsists in the substantial reality of actual beings. Nor is it simply a relationship between specific human individuals who share the same nature. This remains too extrinsic. Rather human sexual difference (together with the child-parent relationship) represents different yet necessarily interdependent ways of constitutively being the same concretely subsisting (human) substantial form in its transcendence. It is this that makes human sexual difference a concrete rather than abstract principle of perfect difference. As Schindler explains, this denotes 'a radically positive relationality: a being for, being from, and being with...'¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 214.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 226.

¹²¹ Ibid., 228.

There is here a coincidence between unity and difference where difference generates unity and unity difference. This represents 'a generative enactment of the analogy of being.'¹²² Sexual difference thus unveils that being's meaning is to affirm difference or, better, the unity-in-difference that corresponds to love.

Returning to the analogy between sexual difference and personhood, we can more fully appreciate how these mutually inform each other. While personal and spiritual reality discloses to a maximal degree the nature of being, this disclosure cannot dispense with what sexual difference unveils about being in terms of correlated fruitful unity-in-difference. The gender-person analogy, therefore, not only reveals the person-like reality of human sexual difference, but personhood's gender-like structure. Instead of identifying personhood with the autonomous individual, sexual difference unveils that equally primordial is the correlated relationship to others who embody differently a way of being that same substance in its openness to *esse*. As Aristotle Papanikolaou notes, *vis-à-vis* Balthasar, this view shares an affinity with certain feminist view which reject the self's reduction to mere individuality, autonomy and independence in favour of 'relational understandings of the self...constituted in and through community and communion.'¹²³

This needs to be extended to include the child-parent relationship. It is the constitutive relationships between mother, father and child that most comprehensively encompass within material reality the transcendent form of human nature and, within the unity of that single nature, manifest *esse's* pattern of positive unity-in-difference. This does not crudely sex *esse*, nor make it banally filial or familial. Rather, it affirms that insofar as the fruitfulness of sexual difference and the progenitors-offspring relationship are construed as different ways of constituting and actively handing on the same single living and spiritual form, and so as intersecting substantial contrarities, they must be sourced in the quasi-formal pattern of *esse* as the highest level of metaphysical reality beyond substance, or, rather, together with substance.

This applies also to personhood. Locating the unity-in-difference of sexual difference, the child-parent relationship and personhood in *esse* gives metaphysical warrant for claiming that one cannot be a human person without being engendered, gendered, and engendering. The relationships of interdependence that constitute human nature both underpin personhood and are fulfilled when enacted in fully interpersonal and so spiritually fruitful ways – that is, when they communicate being as love. Thus, we can affirm Balthasar's statement that 'the highest instance of the *analogia entis* is

¹²² *Ibid.*, 230.

¹²³ Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Person, Kenosis, and Abuse Hans Urs von Balthasar and Feminist Theologies in Conversation," *Modern Theology* 19, (2003): 42.

the *analogia personalitatis*....¹²⁴ Nevertheless, between them there is the mediating analogy of the constitutive human relations or, as Balthasar states elsewhere, the ‘father-mother-child analogy.’¹²⁵ This does not mean, however, that everyone is a biological parent, or, even, that everyone is either male or female as opposed to, say, intersex. As noted above, substantial contraries manifest differently in different individuals. And yet, every person is and always will be a child. This suggests the unity of which the contrary terms are the limit principles of difference is not only ultimately found in the unity-in-difference of *esse* and essence, nor even in *esse*, but, also, more concretely, in being a child who is not simply a product of sexual fruitfulness but divine gift.

As Balthasar stresses, this distinguishes human procreation from other non-spiritual animals. It involves the birth of a spiritual creature whose freedom is irreducible to nature’s necessity.¹²⁶ A child is not simply an extension of its mother and father. A ‘human child is not a mere gift of nature but a personal gift of God.’¹²⁷ And yet precisely as divine gift the child is the fruit of its parent. This articulates the paradox of human reproduction which, though natural, opens to God who ‘hands over his creatorship, making it dependent on events initiated at the will of creatures. The real depth of this mystery only emerges when the child is seen no longer as “*res partis*” but as a personality in direct relationship with God....’¹²⁸ Accordingly, in ‘every fruitful act of conception, God performs an act of quasi-creation (not an absolute act of creation, since it is not creation out of nothing).... God operates “by implementing a system he has already established and instituted in the creature itself”.’¹²⁹ A human child, therefore, comes into existence via a shared act of its parents who mediate God’s personal gift of divine being to bring about a new spirit. This emphasises the mediated immediacy of each person’s relationship to God from the start. It also coincides with how its parents’ love awakens a child to full personal self-consciousness whereby it freely receives and enacts the gift of its personal reality as an embodied spirit open to *esse* in direct (that is, mediated immediate) relationship with God.

¹²⁴ *p*, 23.

¹²⁵ *TL3*, 155. Although Balthasar uses this for an analogy with the Trinity, it also applies to the relationship between created being and human personhood. Here I disagree with Anne E. Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 65, when she questions Balthasar’s notion of meta-anthropology as failing to ‘describe the primacy of “personality” at work in his theology and metaphysics.’ Carpenter places the interpersonal reality of love and the concerns of metaphysics beyond a concrete anthropology.

¹²⁶ Cf., *ExT5*, 22; *TL2*, 61.

¹²⁷ *TD2*, 372.

¹²⁸ *TD2*, 371-372.

¹²⁹ *TD2*, 372n62. Reference to Matthias J. Scheeben, *Hanbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1933), section 151.

6. Sexual and Interpersonal Fruitfulness

The uniqueness of bringing a new child into being as self-conscious spirit emphasises the privileged nature of the fruitfulness of human sexual difference. It enacts the fruitfulness of *esse's* coming to subsistence as the transcendent form of living embodied spirit within the concrete interpersonal relationships. This privilege attaches to the jointly organic and spiritual nature of this fruitfulness. The relationship between these two types of fruitfulness can, however, be interpreted differently: as separate from each other; in opposition; identical; or, as inseparable yet irreducible in a mutually fulfilling manner. Let us consider these in dialogue with Balthasar.

First, regarding the possible separation or opposition of sexual and personal fruitfulness, Balthasar notes, in Western history, this has been interpreted so as to divide 'on the one side, the fruitful encounter between man and woman in personal mutual self-giving – and, on the other side, their sexual union.'¹³⁰ This pivots on how the sexual and spiritual span the realms of freedom and necessity. By necessity, the human species conjoins the animal and spiritual. Accordingly, Balthasar argues a 'species oriented function' such as reproduction should not be diverted from its intrinsic purpose to satisfy personal desire. Yet, a person, as spirit, is free to do so, thereby dividing their organic and spiritual unity. The worry is that sexual fruitfulness is used simply to promote 'the limitless, personal side', undermining 'an act that is meant to be the symbolic expression of an unconditional love between man and woman.'¹³¹ Balthasar's immediate focus here is the teaching against contraception in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Supporting the latter, Balthasar's fear is that, taken to its logical conclusion, placing organic and personal fruitfulness in opposition separates sexual difference, the sexual act, the biological material required to conceive a child, the act of conception, the time of pregnancy, the moment of birth, care for the child, the developing relationship between the adults as parents, sexual desire, and the adults' self-giving love. The issue is not that these are distinct, but whether they are encompassed and fulfilled within a living concrete whole. Indeed, elsewhere Balthasar decries separating the organic and spiritual in the sexual act for fear of 'splitting the human in the very act in which it manifests its deepest unity.'¹³² Without entering here into a discussion about contraception, Balthasar's fear casts the exercise of freedom in the sexual act in an overly negative light as if avoiding conception is always about fulfilling selfish personal desire, rather than conducive to the fruits of mutual self-giving in love.

¹³⁰ *TD2*, 381.

¹³¹ *NE*, 223-224.

¹³² *TD2*, 381.n.94.

Secondly, this underscores Balthasar's concern to safeguard the unity of the organic and personal fruitfulness of human sexual difference. He insists that the sexual-reproductive side of human sexual difference cannot be attributed simply to the material side of human nature, and the sexual-erotic or personal self-giving love to the spiritual to which priority is given.¹³³ They belong together. In emphasising this, there are times when Balthasar univocally elides sexual and personal fruitfulness. As Kilby notes, this becomes reductionist: 'it is not only that male/female relationships are all conceived as marital, and that marriage is considered entirely in terms of sex; sexuality itself, here, is reduced to a sort of biologically conceived act of reproduction.'¹³⁴ Although, as I demonstrate below, Kilby's statement overlooks counterexamples in Balthasar's thought, she correctly identifies a recurring reductionist tendency. For example, he states, if 'in imagination, we were to exclude from the act of love between man and woman the nine months' pregnancy, that is, the temporal dimension, the child would be immediately present in their generative-receptive embrace; this would be simultaneously the expression of their reciprocal love *and*, going beyond it, its transcendent result.'¹³⁵ Here 'the human child is both the proof and the fruit of the reciprocal love of the parents...'¹³⁶ This ignores that the child is primarily proof of sexual fruitfulness, not interpersonal love; and, that love can be fruitful without children (as Balthasar affirms).

To address this, we must draw some distinctions. Though sexual and personal fruitfulness are not the same (there is no necessary relationship between having a child and fruitful love), we can unpack Balthasar's insistence on their unity against the backdrop of his metaphysics. The identification of the self-giving between man and woman, and the fruit of a child, with love can be seen as shorthand for how the fruitfulness of human sexual difference manifests being's fruitfulness. This echoes our discussion in the first chapter where the difference between *esse* and beings 'forms the ontic first step of what love is among free entities.'¹³⁷ Thus, on one level, Balthasar is right that, in the procreation of a child, man and woman mediate the fruitfulness of love understood ontologically. This applies even if they do not personally affirm this love or even reject it. Such ontological love, however, is only fully expressed in the parents' loving interpersonal exchange and mutual commitment, and their openness to the child's existence and its awakening to self-consciousness. As Balthasar says, 'the loving persons (in whom the all-encompassing Being of reality prevails) never close themselves off from one another.... [T]hey are open to the original mystery of Being in their

¹³³ Cf., *TD2*, 381.n.94.

¹³⁴ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 138.

¹³⁵ *TL3*, 160. Cf., *P*, 78.

¹³⁶ *TL3*, 159.

¹³⁷ *E*, 56

(always conditioned) fruitfulness. The fruitfulness they share, rooted in nature (as when a child is conceived)...remains an important but still limited parable of this fruitfulness of love....¹³⁸

To avoid reducing everything to mere sexual fruitfulness, sexual and personal fruitfulness must be seen as mutually dependent yet irreducible to each other according to a certain order. Thus, sexual difference's organic fruitfulness enacts an absolute ontological fruitfulness by bringing another human as spirit into existence. Such sexual fruitfulness, however, is no guarantee of personal love and its attendant spiritual fruitfulness. It must be fulfilled in the fruitfulness of spiritual and interpersonal love. This entails a loving self-giving between adults whose welcome awakens a child to self-conscious freedom in its spiritual openness to *esse*. It coincides with how the child's existence as spirit is not simply of its parents, but a personal gift of God who shares the divine capacity to create and awaken new spirits with the parents. The corollary is that a human child is utterly dependent on the gift of love without which it could not live, let alone live as spirit. In discontinuity with other animals, this involves an exposure to the risk of a lack of love. The child's being calls to the hearts of adult world, demanding what can only be given freely – love. As Balthasar says, '[t]he child...not only originates from his parents' mutual love but also depends on its continuation for his future existence and growth, an exigency that seals the permanence of his parents' mutual commitment in turn....'¹³⁹

That said, to be a personal expression of sexual difference's fruitfulness, this cannot simply be an act of will. It must engage the whole person and be rooted in the heart's attunement to being. Indeed, even before the question of children, Balthasar finds the primal experience of a child awakening to self-consciousness reawakened in adults erotically attracted to each other: 'the ability to marvel that was enjoyed at the dawn of life again awakens in the same primal sense.'¹⁴⁰ This erotic awakening in wonder moves 'from the surface of the senses into the depths of the heart: for here eros can keep alive an awed amazement at one's partner's self-surrender within all the routine of the common life, even after the first sensual stimulus has evaporated.'¹⁴¹ Moreover, Balthasar notes how the arrival of a new child evokes surprise in its parents: 'a surprise which overtakes the phenomenon of growth and blossoming [of the parents' love for each other].'¹⁴² Such surprise is not merely psychological, but metaphysical. The child's existence as 'a third, independent spirit-person' is 'an incomprehensible wonder' and 'unexpected delight' for the parents 'perhaps even and precisely in

¹³⁸ *E*, 57.

¹³⁹ *ExT5*, 150-151.

¹⁴⁰ *UBC*, 46.

¹⁴¹ *UBC*, 46-47.

¹⁴² *P*, 190.

those cases where they had attempted to prevent the child from being born.¹⁴³ This connects the birth and self-conscious awakening of a child with the reawakening of the parents' child-like wonder. This is not, however, a foregone conclusion. Because the encounter with a newborn child takes place within the realm of freedom, the advent of a child and the demand it places on its parents, can be experienced as an invitation to freedom or a threat to it. Accordingly, the opposite response is also possible. The birth of a child may be a cause of anger, fear, despair or angst, and be rejected.

The upshot of this intertwining of sexual and personal fruitfulness is that the most perfect fruitful self-giving – whose fruit is a child born, awoken and nurtured into self-conscious freedom – happens via the wholehearted commitments between two loving adults who are sexually different. This reflects how they willingly open their hearts both to each other and to the fruitful possibility of a new life as a gift of their personal sharing of their common nature based on their correlated difference.¹⁴⁴ The fruitfulness of this exchange pertains to how sexually different adults can, in their concrete personal gestures, give and receive more than themselves in their living spiritual nature's transcendent openness to *esse* as disclosed decisively in a child. Indeed, for Balthasar, this receives its fullest expression in the commitment made in marriage.¹⁴⁵

However, Balthasar also makes clear that this capacity concretely to give more is not limited to sexual difference and children or family life. It discloses a 'law' of the fruitfulness of living spiritual human nature where the latter reflects within its freedom and interdependence the fruitfulness of love as expressive of the fruitful gift of being. This law is operative 'not only in "first love" or in the sexual act; it leaves its impress on the family and everything belonging to it; in short, it characterises all human life, which is a 'play' of 'representations' that are precisely more lively when, in the game of life, man assumes the most serious ethical responsibilities....'¹⁴⁶ As Balthasar says elsewhere, 'the element of propagation' does not disappear; rather 'this form of "excess" and "fruit" (which can be spiritual-intellectual) belongs to every love, including the higher forms.'¹⁴⁷ The fruitfulness of human sexual difference, therefore, is not simply the condition for another person's existence, but paradigmatic for personal fruitfulness between people who transcend themselves by freely sharing their concrete selves where this results in a fruit beyond them both.

¹⁴³ *TL2*, 61.

¹⁴⁴ *GL1*, 445-446

¹⁴⁵ *GL1*, 27. At *TL2*, 61-62, Balthasar refers approvingly to Matthias J. Scheeben, *Die Mysterien des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1865), 572-576, such that a non-Christian and non-sacramental marriage has a quasi-sacramental character as it involves the production of 'new images of God' and God's immediate involvement in the man-woman union.

¹⁴⁶ *GL1*, 446

¹⁴⁷ *TL3*, 160.

The fruitfulness between persons is not limited to the relationships between the sexes or between parents and child, but goes beyond these relationships of fruitful self-transcendence into a plethora of relationships that underpin human community.¹⁴⁸ As Balthasar comments, ‘since there are countless such incidences of transcendence in human society, they always burst the closed model (for example, marriage) and bring about many movements that cross and recross like waves.’¹⁴⁹ Thus, each person shows that they have ‘understood God’s gesture of gift-giving by taking it over and becoming a giver: not only in the generation of children, but in every kind of human communication and fruitfulness.’¹⁵⁰ As Balthasar affirms, ‘fecundity is the law, not only of organisms but...also of the life of the spirit.... [E]very I-Thou relationship between spirits can be fulfilled only in an objective third (as Hegel never tires of stressing) or in the fact that genuine *paideia* (according to Plato) is a “begetting in the beautiful” and thus the generation of a fruit.’¹⁵¹ This echoes Balthasar’s point, noted above, that the fruitfulness shared between lovers ripples beyond them, and arrives from myriad sources, becoming more vital in exchanges that enact the good (and the true and beautiful) – something I consider in chapter four.

7. Critiquing Balthasar’s Account of Male and Female

I turn now to what distinguishes the male and female modes of being human. I focus specifically on how male and female fruitfulness, in their interdependent enactment of human organic and spiritual fruitfulness, distinctively mediate *esse* by handing on the immanent transcendence of human nature’s spiritual living form to the fruit that is a child.

I approach this in two steps: first via a critical engagement with Balthasar’s thought; and, secondly, a speculative reworking of the latter. While Balthasar affirms the metaphysical provenance of the distinctiveness of male and female fruitfulness, I argue he loses sight of their reciprocity as rooted in being’s analogical nature. Here I both echo and differ from Kilby’s critique of Balthasar. She acknowledges that at times Balthasar treats sexual difference ‘with a clear sense of symmetry....’¹⁵² However, she judges that in the end he prioritises an asymmetrical unilateral priority of man over woman. I agree. However, I add that safeguarding the reciprocity between the sexes requires a certain kind of asymmetry.

7.1. Created being as feminine vis-à-vis divine being

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *TD2*, 413.

¹⁴⁹ *TD3*, 525-526.

¹⁵⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2005), 128-129

¹⁵¹ *TL2*, 62.

¹⁵² Kilby, *Balthasar*, 128. Referring to *TD2*, 366.

In distinguishing the sexes, Balthasar makes a fateful choice: to associate the feminine with the active receptivity of created being.¹⁵³ This represents an important innovation regarding the Aristotelian metaphysics which associates the female with the receptive potency of matter and, therefore, with imperfection. As David L. Schindler comments, Balthasar transforms the association between the feminine and receptivity: ‘receptivity is now seen as an essential ingredient of what is meant primitively by act (*esse*), that is, as distinct from what is merely “potential,” and receptivity is thereby seen from the beginning as a perfection.’¹⁵⁴ This aligns with what we examined in chapter one: the actuality of each being’s participation in *esse* is receptive to essence where this ontological receptivity is further expressed through action and letting be.

For Balthasar, the alignment of created *esse*’s receptivity with the feminine makes all created being feminine.¹⁵⁵ One implication of this seems to be that God is masculine. Balthasar, however, wants to avoid a one-to-one correspondence between male-female and God-creation. While the feminine aligns with created being because both are understood to be receptive and responsive, the masculine does not align with God because, unlike the human male whose *esse* is also secondary and receptive, God is not dependent on creation.¹⁵⁶ Balthasar thus emphasises that any similarity between God’s act of creation and the male’s activity vis-à-vis the female’s receptivity requires a greater dissimilarity between them. It is this dissimilarity that most characterises the *esse* of male humanity. Nevertheless, Balthasar still affirms a male priority on this basis. As Gerard Loughlin argues, ‘Balthasar wants equality of male and female but the text displays the priority of the male; he wants the priority of the male but the text insinuates an equality with the female, so we have the “relative priority of the man,” which only whispers of the relative equality of the woman.’¹⁵⁷

Though beyond this thesis’ remit, Balthasar locates the ultimate metaphysical origin of sexual difference in the Trinity. Within the pure act of divine being, Balthasar attributes both an active sense of act (‘active *actio*’) and a receptive sense of act (‘passive *actio*’) to the different Triune Persons based on their relationships of origin.¹⁵⁸ By associating the active with the masculine and the

¹⁵³ The German word for receptivity is *empfänglichkeit*; or in verbal form *empfangen*. As Gardner and Moss highlight, Balthasar plays on the different textures of its meaning since it means not only to receive, but to conceive a child; and to give welcome. See Gardner and Moss, “Something like the Sexes,” 70.

¹⁵⁴ Schindler, “Catholic Theology, Gender,” 205. Cf., Jacob H. Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy: The Trinitarian Logic of Von Balthasar and the Problem of Evil* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 112–13. Friesenhahn accepts as unproblematic Balthasar’s identification of receptivity with the feminine *per se*.

¹⁵⁵ *TD3*, 286.

¹⁵⁶ *TD3*, 287.

¹⁵⁷ Gerard Loughlin, “Erotics: God’s Sex,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 153.

¹⁵⁸ *TD5*, 86.

receptive with the feminine, Balthasar analogically assigns both masculinity and femininity to the different Persons of the Trinity based on how they are active and receptive towards each other. Balthasar stresses the analogical nature of this by the terms '(supra-) feminine' and '(supra-) masculine.'¹⁵⁹ Thus, for example, both the Father and the Son are in different ways (supra-) feminine and (supra-) masculine in relation to each other and the Spirit. This account of something like sexual difference in the Trinity undermines any straightforward attribution of one sex to any divine Person. However, as several critics note, Balthasar simply transposes to divine being his identification of receptivity with the feminine and activity with the masculine.¹⁶⁰ He does not always, however, maintain this fixed association.¹⁶¹ Indeed, Balthasar's Trinitarian thought develops in the later *TL3*. This echoes Balthasar's shift towards seeing sexual difference through the lens of fruitfulness, childlikeness and wonder. It also counterbalances Balthasar's use of the receptive feminine and active masculine vis-à-vis the Trinity. Here Balthasar draws an analogy between the fruitfulness of the sexes as manifested in the wonder of a new self-conscious child and how the fruitful and wonder-filled relationship between the Father and Son manifests its intrinsic excess and objective fruit in the Person of the Holy Spirit who is also the bond of their love.¹⁶² Balthasar calls this the 'father-mother-child analogy' while stressing its limits as a 'remote metaphor for the mystery of the inner fullness of the absolute, divine Unity.'¹⁶³

7.2. *The feminine as receptive in sexual intercourse*

Our concern here, however, is why Balthasar equates the feminine with receptivity and, therefore, with the receptivity of created being. This hinges on his understanding of female fruitfulness in reproduction. As David L. Schindler approvingly summarises Balthasar,

[i]t is only through the woman's (active) receptivity of the seed that new life can begin. Properly speaking, ...that receptivity is spiritual before it is physical... [I]t is precisely through the receptivity, the continuing "*fiat*," of the mother that the child first experiences *the truth*

¹⁵⁹ *TD5*, 91. Translation adjusted.

¹⁶⁰ See Gerard Loughlin, "Sexing the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 79, (1998): 24, who states that Balthasar 'fails to measure the infinite distance between ourselves and the Trinity, whose relations Balthasar describes in resolutely sexual terms, parodying the ancient biology that informs Balthasar's Trinity'. Cf., Corinne Crammer, "One Sex or Two?: Balthasar's Theology of the Sexes," in Oakes and Moss, *Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 101-102; Gavin d'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity: Gender, Culture and the Divine* (London: SCM Press, 2000) and, "Queer Trinity," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. G. Loughlin (Malden, MA, Blackwell, 2007), 270-273; and, Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 39-40, 43-44.

¹⁶¹ *TD2*, 315; *TD3*, 518; *ExT3*, 31.

¹⁶² See, *TL3*, 140-141, 226-227, 243.

¹⁶³ *TL3*, 155.

of (created) being as gift... [It is] the *feminine person* – who first and best reveals the meaning of (created) being.¹⁶⁴

This rehearses central themes in this thesis. However, it also encapsulates problematic aspects of Balthasar's view. It is unclear why spiritual receptivity is uniquely feminine. This identifies ontological and spiritual receptivity with a narrow biological understanding of female fruitfulness in sexual reproduction. As Beattie argues, this involves a 'muddling of biological and spiritual categories.'¹⁶⁵ It contravenes Balthasar's insistence that sex is an integral act of the whole person that should involve a mutual exchange between man and woman where both are active and receptive on a physical and spiritual level, albeit differently. Balthasar articulates this, though infrequently.¹⁶⁶

More commonly, he asserts that in sex the woman is receptive, the male active. This holds despite Balthasar's criticism of the ancient and medieval view 'that in procreation only the man plays an active, effective role, while the woman is merely passive and receptive.'¹⁶⁷ As he elaborates,

in sexual intercourse it is the man who is the initiator, the leader, the shaper while the woman's love – even if it is not passive, but just as active in its own way – is still essentially receptive. We could almost say (very naively) that, through the man, the woman is somehow awakened to herself, to the fullness of her feminine self-awareness. This initiative on the man's part is something primary that sets in motion the whole process of feminine fruitfulness.¹⁶⁸

This is a problematic on several fronts. In sex, man is not always the initiator. Balthasar sidesteps the dramatic experience of actual humans and applies preconceptions of male and female roles in the sexual act. He also limits sex to the mechanics of male and female reproductive organs. Another omission is how the female fertility cycle is independent of male initiative, even if it is oriented to male fruitfulness vis-à-vis reproduction. It is false to state that the 'fruitfulness of the woman is always dependent on an original fructification.'¹⁶⁹ While this applies specifically to a new child, it does not concern female fruitfulness per se. Moreover, the male contribution to conception, while necessary, is insufficient to awaken the woman's fruitfulness. Science tells us that this requires implantation in the woman's uterus and a hormone-mediated communication from the embryo to the mother. More problematic is how Balthasar applies this receptive dependence to define what it

¹⁶⁴ Schindler, "Catholic Theology, Gender," 221-222.

¹⁶⁵ Beattie, "A Man and Three Women," 104.

¹⁶⁶ Cf., *UBC*, 16.

¹⁶⁷ *NE*, 212.

¹⁶⁸ *NE*, 216.

¹⁶⁹ *NE*, 193. Cf., *ExT5*, 166-7.

means to be a woman: it is 'woman's essential vocation to receive man's fruitfulness into her own fruitfulness, thus uniting in herself the fruitfulness of both.'¹⁷⁰ This reduces woman to being a fruitful response to male initiative.¹⁷¹ Indeed, Balthasar seems tacitly to acknowledge the problematic nature of this view by parenthetically admitting his naivety regarding feminine fruitfulness. This is hardly a credible corrective.¹⁷²

The above gives warrant to Balthasar's feminist critics. Kilby summarises the concern well. She acknowledges how Balthasar's supporters stress that the female is not identified with mere passivity but an active receptivity where this is interpreted positively as characterising the deepest vocation of every human. Nonetheless, she asks 'how *plausible* it is...to identify woman so fundamentally with receptivity.... The notion of women as receptive is derived from the (traditionally conceived) act of intercourse, and perhaps also a certain fit with traditional courting patterns, but can find little purchase in relation to the great majority of the roles women currently do play or have traditionally played.'¹⁷³

Balthasar also fails the male perspective. Beyond the episodic provision of sperm, there is a paucity in his consideration of male fruitfulness, whether spiritual or embodied, in the interaction between mother and father, and father and child. Moreover, unlike the awakening that affects the woman, the man is excluded from any awakening on his part. The sexual act and its fruit are of limited spiritual significance for him.

Balthasar's problematic understanding of the sexual act and the initial stages of reproduction have far-reaching implications for his interpretation of how *esse* subsists as distinctively male and female humanity. Kilby notes how, scattered throughout his work, Balthasar makes what are predominantly unargued statements about what it means to be a man or woman. She collates the results:

to be male is to be strong, to take initiative, to be active and goal-orientated; to be a woman is to be open, receptive, surrendering, passive, to be characterized by weakness and dependence, to be contemplative. And within these clusters, perhaps the most insistent,

¹⁷⁰ TD3, 286.

¹⁷¹ Cf., Rachel Muers, "A Question of Two Answers: Difference and Determination in Barth and von Balthasar," *Hethrop Journal* 60, (1999): 276; and, "The Mute Cannot Keep Silent: Barth, von Balthasar, and Irigaray, on the Construction of Women's Silence," in *Challenging Women's Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Sydney: Ashgate, 2000), 109-120.

¹⁷² Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 167, identifies in Balthasar's account of the sexes a psychological struggle stemming from his sexual desire for Arienne von Speyr, an important collaborator in his work. For a rebuttal, see Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology*, 304.

¹⁷³ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 132-133. See also, *ibid.*, 129-130. Cf., Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 143.

frequently mentioned, the defining contrast, is that man takes initiative and is active, while woman is receptive.¹⁷⁴

Kilby does not, however, consider how Balthasar's comments about the sexes inform how they relate to each other. For this I turn to Balthasar's sustained reflection on sexual difference in *TD2* and *TD3*.

7.3. *The primary nature of man and the secondary nature of woman*

As seen earlier, in *TD2*, Balthasar first interprets the male-female difference as a mutuality and difference rooted in *esse* that encompasses the twofold extreme ways of being human. He modifies this via an interpretation of the Genesis narrative regarding Adam and Eve. He assigns specific metaphysical markers that distinguish the sexes and reinforce the troubling implications of his account of sexual intercourse.

First, based on Adam's initial solitude in Eden, Balthasar accords primacy to the male. '[H]e is alone before God and with God; although potentially and unconsciously he bears the woman within him, he cannot give her to himself.'¹⁷⁵ Secondly, this loneliness is 'not good'. This challenges 'the idea of a primal, androgynous human, supposedly originally at peace with himself and only subject to unsatisfied longing after being split into sexes. But it also refutes the notion that the lonely human (or man) can attain fulfilment by knowing and naming the world.'¹⁷⁶ Thirdly, 'the woman comes from the man. It is through being overpowered in a "deep sleep" and robbed of part of himself, near his heart, that man is given fulfilment.'¹⁷⁷ Here, Balthasar insists the man 'retains a primacy while at the same time, at God's instigation, he steps down from it in a *kenosis*; this results in the God-given fulfilment whereby he recognizes himself in the gift of the "other".'¹⁷⁸ Balthasar concludes that in 'the relationship between the two, where each is created by God and dependent on the other, even though one is "taken" out of the other, the man's (persisting) priority is located within an equality of man and woman.'¹⁷⁹

Before examining Balthasar's elaboration of these points, a tension is apparent in Balthasar's insistence upon the reciprocity between the sexes. We might have supposed, as Kilby states, 'that when Balthasar describes woman as...fulfilling and completing man, this is really shorthand for

¹⁷⁴ Cf., Kilby, *Balthasar*, 129.

¹⁷⁵ *TD2*, 372-373. This primacy is something that Balthasar absolutizes in Christ. See *TD2*, 413.

¹⁷⁶ *TD2*, 373.

¹⁷⁷ *TD2*, 373.

¹⁷⁸ *TD2*, 373.

¹⁷⁹ *TD2*, 373.

saying that each, in their difference, can be fulfilment...for the other....'; but there is 'a genuine ambiguity...on this point.'¹⁸⁰ Positively, Balthasar insists on the equal worth of male and female humanity. They are created by God. Their mutual dependency and difference encompass human nature's good. That the woman comes from near man's heart for his fulfilment suggests this concerns not simply sexual fruitfulness, but spiritual. The latter is attained not through knowledge of things, but ecstatic interpersonal recognition. The language of the heart emphasises this is no mere intellectual or wilful activity but concerns the whole of human nature. None of these aspects need exclude male-female reciprocity.

That said, for Balthasar, the mutuality depends on male priority over the female who is derived and proceeds from him. This is described violently: the male is robbed.¹⁸¹ Balthasar, in effect, asserts a fractal complementarity with the difference that, rather than male and female representing two halves of a single unity, the female is a missing part of the original male whole.¹⁸² Beattie rightly worries this undermines real difference – 'if she is "taken" out of the male other, then she is not really other at all.'¹⁸³ The male's fulfilment comes by following this lack through self-emptying which is received by the woman as her mission solely for the male's benefit. The female is reduced to being a gift that enables male fulfilment through his ecstatically recognizing himself. She is simply an empty limit. Female fulfilment is occluded. This rightly raises the concern that Balthasar's views 'threaten violence in the reductive logic of a phenomenological account of sexual difference.'¹⁸⁴

7.4. Male as word and searching look; female as answer and returning look

This ambiguity between an abiding reciprocity between the sexes, and male primacy and female subservience is intensified in *TD3*.¹⁸⁵ Here Balthasar explores the man-woman difference via two pairings concerning the realms of speech and perception. The first pair correlates the male to word (*Wort*) and the female to response/answer (*Ant-Wort*). The second identifies the male with a countenance that looks (*Litz*) and female with the face that returns the look (*Antlitz*).

¹⁸⁰ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 127.

¹⁸¹ Cf., Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 105.

¹⁸² Cf., Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 313. Balthasar here asserts a primordial femininity within male humanity that the man recognises in the woman as other. This contradicts his assertion that man and woman are wholly male and female.

¹⁸³ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 105.

¹⁸⁴ Gardner and Moss "Something Like the Sexes," 124.

¹⁸⁵ Cf., Gardner and Moss, "Something Like the Sexes," 82-94. They identify how in *TD3* Balthasar problematically fixes the differences between male and female, undermining any genuine reciprocity.

To expand, first, woman is essentially an answer (*Antwort*), and so responsive, receptive and secondary to man's calling word (*Wort*) which is primary and initiating.¹⁸⁶ Balthasar understands *Ant* to encompass opposition and dependency; 'both "direction toward" and the counterpart to something.'¹⁸⁷ As he explains:

man is the word that calls out, woman is the answer that comes to him at last (in the *end*). The two are related and ordered to each other. Furthermore, ...the word that calls out only attains fulfilment when it is understood, accepted and given back as a word. This clearly shows us how man can be primary and woman secondary, where the primary remains unfulfilled without the secondary. The primary needs a partner of equal rank and dignity for its own fulfilment. Moreover, the man is incapable of providing this answering dimension; it is latent within him...but it has to be given to him as grace.¹⁸⁸

Secondly, whereas the *Wort-Antwort* distinction applies to the realm of speech, understanding, judgement and reason, the *Litz-Antlitz* applies to visual perception: 'Man and woman are face to face. Here their equal rank is given even more emphasis: man looks around him and meets with an answering gaze that turns the one-who-sees into the one-who-is seen.'¹⁸⁹ The greater equality coincides with how an encounter in the visual realm, unlike that of (coherent) speech, can be simultaneous in time.

To consider these further, positively, Balthasar understands male and female in terms of a spiritual fulfilment that is the fruit of concrete interpersonal encounter. The latter entails a recognition based on a shared freedom rooted in a common nature and underpinned by the gift of divine *esse*. Hence, Balthasar affirms 'the substantial unity and equality of *Wort* and *Antwort* (word and answer), *Litz* and *Antlitz* (the "look" and the "face" that returns it).'¹⁹⁰ This spiritual encounter is enacted via sense-based perception, language and thought. Moreover, as the reference to the biblical 'at last' alludes to, the encounter is characterised by the man's wonder at the woman. For the male, the female is a personal reality that exceeds him, yet calls to the depths of his being. She is a source of delight which neither he nor the rest of creation can provide. This reflects woman being the man's correlated extreme opposite and co-agent in mediating the transcendent form of human nature she shares with him in their joint openness to *esse*. Balthasar says,

¹⁸⁶ Cf., *TD3*, 290.

¹⁸⁷ *TD3*, 284. Cf., Crammer, "One Sex or Two?", 98, for the linguistic anomalies underpinning this.

¹⁸⁸ *TD3*, 284-285.

¹⁸⁹ *TD3*, 285.

¹⁹⁰ *TD3*, 285.

[h]ad God not formed Eve from Adam but (like him) from the dust of the earth, their unity would have been an external one, and Adam could not have recognized her as “flesh of my flesh”. And if the making of woman from man had not been an act of God but a natural process, the original meeting of these two freedom humans would not have had the miraculous character it does have and must have: it would be merely an instance of sexual correlation at the natural level. Both sides – the “from within” and the “from without”, “from above” – are equally essential. In other words, Eve is potentially in Adam, but he himself cannot produce her from within him.¹⁹¹

This allots primordial significance to the mutuality of wonder shared between a man and woman who offer themselves freely to each other in openness to all fruitfulness, sharing immanently the same self-transcending nature in its participation in the gift of being. This suggests that what Balthasar says about the *Wort-Antwort* and *Litz-Antlitz* distinctions should not be reduced to sexual fruitfulness.¹⁹² Rather, the spiritual is accorded primacy over the organic in their inseparability.¹⁹³ This is corroborated by Balthasar’s view, stated elsewhere, that the meeting of Adam and Eve concerns the concrete condition of possibility of human encounter. ‘This man cannot know what a human encounter is, nor can he postulate it.... [T]he answer lies dormant within him, next to his heart; but first the rib must be removed from him and placed over against him as a living Thou by God’s creative act.’¹⁹⁴ This interpretation is consistent with man and woman embodying the extreme contraries of being human. Only together do they manifest humanity’s intrinsic self-transcendence where their union intensifies their mystery to themselves and each other that exceeds their mutual commitment in love. Indeed, another’s love deepens the self’s mysterious depths.¹⁹⁵ This recapitulates in adulthood how each person attains self-consciousness as a child through another’s love and awakens to God’s ever-greater being.

In this, however, Balthasar fails to maintain reciprocity between the sexes. The above is framed as man’s questioning, paradox and fulfilment beyond self. As Beattie says, ‘[i]f woman is the answer to man, she can exist only within the parameters of the man’s question. She must await his word and respond to his initiative, but how can she then reveal her difference and otherness? And if woman is

¹⁹¹ *TD3*, 285.

¹⁹² Aidan Nichols argues Balthasar’s exegesis of the Genesis, at *TD2*, 381-382, concerns not sexual but spiritual fruitfulness, thereby echoing Karl Barth’s interpretation that the focus in Genesis is the male-female relationship per se and not familial relationships. *No Bloodless Myth: a Guide through Balthasar’s Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 110. Crammer, “One Sex or Two?”, 110n.20, challenges this.

¹⁹³ Cf., *ST*, 1a.92.1.

¹⁹⁴ *ExT4*, 19

¹⁹⁵ *ExT4*, 20

man's answer, to whom does she address the question of her own being?¹⁹⁶ The male's prioritization over the female becomes clearer as Balthasar's account in *TD3* proceeds.¹⁹⁷

Balthasar tries to insist on the abiding equality between man and woman given that Eve is not just derived from Adam's side but fashioned directly by God. But unlike the man, woman is defined essentially by her dependence on him for her *raison d'être* as his fulfilment. For example, Balthasar states since woman 'is both "answer" and "face" (*Antwort* and *Antlitz*), she is dependent on the man's word (*Wort*), which calls to her, and his "look"..., which searches for her; but at the same time, she is independent of him in virtue of her free, equal rank.'¹⁹⁸ Despite the insistence on freedom, the derivative and secondary nature of woman predominates. This denies female humanity proper freedom. She is 'chronologically, temporally, historical, accidentally second.'¹⁹⁹ Only if she is free is she suitable for man's fulfilment; yet this is construed as a predetermined essential servitude to man's fulfilment.²⁰⁰ The woman is denied her own agency.²⁰¹ Nowhere is "she" permitted a question, nor does "she" even speak, because "she" is *essentially* an answer (*Antwort*).²⁰² Thus, the female is defined as fulfilling what the male already potentially is.²⁰³ This remains true even where such fulfilment is understood as an intensification of humanity's mystery reflecting God's mystery. Woman is man's means to such mystery, not a subject in her own right.²⁰⁴

This reduction of woman as means to male fulfilment becomes more apparent when Balthasar considers the encounter in terms of fruitfulness. While he is clear that woman is not simply 'the vessel' of male fruitfulness but possesses her own fruitfulness, nevertheless

[hers] is not a primary fruitfulness: it is an answering fruitfulness, designed to receive man's fruitfulness...and bring it to its "fullness". In this way she is the "glory" of the man (1 Cor 11:7). So we can speak of a kind of natural *vocation* on woman's part much more explicitly than in man's case.... To that extent, the woman's *mission* vis-à-vis Adam can be described as the extrapolation and continuation of her *processio* from Adam. Of course, this aspect must

¹⁹⁶ Beattie, "A Man and Three Women," 99.

¹⁹⁷ Cf., Gardner and Moss: "Difference—the Immaculate Concept?," 383: 'All rhetoric of equality, complementarity and mutuality is severely threatened by this insistence on a spectral, retrospective sexual identity and security for man apart from woman.'

¹⁹⁸ *TD3*, 292.

¹⁹⁹ Gardner and Moss, "Something like the Sexes," 86.

²⁰⁰ Crammer, "One Sex or Two?," 105-106, argues that the use of *Antwort* and *Anlitz* to describe women are "explicitly or implicitly hierarchical and incompatible with equality." Cf., d'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*, 31.

²⁰¹ Crammer, "One Sex or Two?," 106.

²⁰² Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 42.

²⁰³ Moss and Gardner, "Difference—The Immaculate Concept?" 385.

²⁰⁴ Cf., Gardner and Moss, "Something like the Sexes," 88-89.

not obscure the other truth, namely, that both man and woman *individually* (and not only *together*) constitute an “image of God”; thus each has a guaranteed direct access to God.²⁰⁵

Woman’s essential identity as proceeding from man is identified with her essential mission as man’s fulfilment. As Beattie rightly worries, ‘woman becomes a projection of man, and the particularity and revelatory potential of female sexual embodiment is denied.’²⁰⁶ As she notes elsewhere, ‘[a]n individual who exists as another’s fullness, as his glory, is not a genuine other. As Irigaray would argue, a woman who exists as man’s fullness is nothing but the mirror wherein man sees only the other of himself...’²⁰⁷ There is no mention of a genuine reciprocity of fulfilment and fruitfulness. Woman is associated with a natural vocation but man is removed from the latter, suggesting an orientation of ‘women’s subjectivity and existence to the realization of men’s and the reduction of women to their biological role in reproduction.’²⁰⁸

In metaphysical terms, Balthasar essentialises the two constitutive ways of being human.²⁰⁹ The receptivity inherent to *esse* is identified with the presupposed secondary and derivative character of female fruitfulness. Woman serves the active actuality of *esse* associated with the primary and initiating form of male fruitfulness and its transcendence beyond itself. Transcendent male fruitfulness is immanently tended to by female fruitfulness. As Tonstad rightly argues, this undermines difference in that ‘cooperation or agreement always reduces to an initiator and a (spontaneous but always “second” in relation to a “first”) responder...’²¹⁰ Rather than being a substantial contrariety established between two positive correlates, Balthasar offers a variation on the Aristotelian perspective that the woman is a deficient male. He also implicitly employs Aristotle’s understanding of correlatives wherein one term is derived from or the possession of the other. The difference is that Balthasar holds that the male is dependent on this deficient and derived male (i.e. female) to be what he fully already is. This ‘eventuates as masculinity’s full development inside and in relation to feminine self-evacuation. Such a relationship cannot engender real difference, and real difference is essential to Balthasar’s project.’²¹¹ This suggests a lingering Hegelianism that

²⁰⁵ TD3, 285-286.

²⁰⁶ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 94.

²⁰⁷ Beattie, “Sex, Death and Melodrama,” 166.

²⁰⁸ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 43.

²⁰⁹ See Gardner and Moss, “Something like the Sexes,” 86; and, Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 112. Cf., Michelle A. Gonzalez, “Hans Urs Von Balthasar And Contemporary Feminist Theology,” *Theological Studies* 65, (2004): 591, notes how Balthasar’s anthropology challenges essentialism, yet his view of sexual difference succumbs to it.

²¹⁰ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 44. Tonstad refers to the Trinity and sexual difference. She fails, however, to consider the positive difference between adult and children where the child is responsive and receptive.

²¹¹ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 42.

undermines genuine male-female reciprocity, making their difference a dialectical relationship where woman is a moment in man's overall, albeit abstract, fulfilment. I concur, therefore, with Kilby's assessment that 'while Balthasar appears to...make much of sexual difference, it is not a *real* sexual difference that he envisages, but one which begins from man and then casts woman as whatever is needed to complement and fulfil him. He is trapped...in a "one-sex" anthropology, "in which the normative human is implicitly male and Woman's definition is based around Man, particularly around what Man is seen to need Woman to be."²¹²

7.5. *Man as monadic; woman dyadic*

This is reinforced by how Balthasar declares woman is not only secondary but essentially double. Woman is 'not only "second" ("answer") but "dual (dyad).'²¹³ There is an 'oscillation within woman herself: she is oriented to the man yet has equal rank with him, sharing in the same free human nature. The man has no equivalent experience of this irreducible double focus.'²¹⁴ Balthasar sees the male as a fixed single principle of fruitfulness, or monadic, and woman as a double fluctuating derivative principle. Where there is any male dependence on the woman is it limited to how she fulfils what the man already is, but cannot be without her.²¹⁵ '[M]an represents a single principle (word, seed), the woman represents a double principle: she is the "answer" and the common "fruit" of both of them.'²¹⁶ Woman is the common fruit because she fulfils in herself man's fruitfulness. Again, woman is ultimately sublimated.

Woman is double not only vis-à-vis man but also the child conceived within her. This expands the metaphysical marker of being woman to a double dual ordering. First, woman is, one, derived from and, two, relates to man; second, she, one, relates to the child that, two, is derived from her. Balthasar sees this double duality, moreover, through another duality, namely, that of personal and organic fruitfulness. In relation to man, she 'gives a twofold answer: a "personal" answer and one that goes beyond the I-thou relationship (and which, in the absence of a more precise word, one may call "generic" or "of the species"). She responds through reproduction.'²¹⁷ This rightly insists on the analogous unity-in-difference between personal and sexual fruitfulness where the personal transcends the sexual while depending on it. In this, 'the dyad of the feminine principle is...irreducible...insofar as the woman's relation to the man is different from her relation to the

²¹² Kilby, *Balthasar*, 130. Reference to Crammer, "One Sex or Two?", 102.

²¹³ *TD3*, 290.

²¹⁴ *TD3*, 297.

²¹⁵ Cf., *TD3*, 292-293.

²¹⁶ *TD3*, 286-287.

²¹⁷ *TD3*, 286.

child...in that the woman is essentially equal to the man but personally unlike him; she comes from him and is oriented to him.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is unclear why this is applied only to the woman and not also to the man who is excluded from any genuine personal reciprocity with the woman and from being a co-agent in reproduction and nurture. This echoes Balthasar's understanding of male sexual fruitfulness. 'As a sexual being, the man is explicitly monadic, whereas woman is dyadic: the area of woman that interests the man sexually is not the same that the child desires for its sustenance.'²¹⁹ This disassociates the male from reproduction and nurture. It also entirely omits woman's sexual interest, reducing woman's sexuality to a mere part defined by male desire.

Thus, while Balthasar insists sexual and personal fruitfulness are analogically interwoven in how they express the transcendence of form in the concrete unity of human nature, he forgets the female and male reciprocity that constitutes this transcendence. By treating male humanity as monadic, Balthasar leaves the male outside the contrarities that hand on the form of human nature wherein *esse* subsists. Man stands outside the dramatic relationships of male-female and parent-child. He is left alone in human nature's transcendent mystery that is reminiscent of the modern/post-modern independent rational self-conscious adult self. While this requires woman for its fulfilment, it is a male fruitfulness outsourced to woman. By contrast, woman is wholly identified with the interdependence of the constitutive contraries of human nature (male-female, parent-child) for the benefit of male fulfilment. She is the non-male who allows the man to be fully constituted in his sexually and personal monadic freedom in openness to the divine being. She is the parent who actively brings the child into existence and calls it to self-conscious freedom but again for male fulfilment. Woman's self-conscious freedom and personal and sexual fruitfulness are elided.

This picture of woman as encompassing within herself the whole reciprocity inherent to human nature is reinforced by how Balthasar identifies an ambiguity that is distinctively female. Compared to the indefinability that characterises humanity, and, implicitly, male humanity, woman 'is even more elusive because of her twofold orientation toward the man and the child; this both constitutes her as a person through dialogue and makes her a principle of generation. In one relationship, she is the answer that is necessary if the word that calls to her is to attain its full meaning; in the other relationship, she herself is the source..., and hence she is the primary call addressed to the child.'²²⁰ Again with abstractly dialectical undertones, Balthasar states that '[t]here is a twofold reason, therefore, why woman cannot be summed up in a neat definition. She is a process that oscillates

²¹⁸ *TD3*, 338.

²¹⁹ *TD3*, 290n.7. Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 48, comments, 'invisible here...is another aspect of "woman's" sexual being: the primary site of her pleasure.'

²²⁰ *TD3*, 292-293.

(...from the answering Person to the Source of the race); it is the theorizing of men that attempts to make this flux and flow into a rigid principle.²²¹ This reference to men theorizing is telling. It rightly challenges any positivistic attempt by men to define women as if men and women were not, in their irreducible asymmetry, dependent on each other, thereby situating men outside the dramatic enactment of humanity's primal form. Yet Balthasar does precisely this by claiming that woman is defined by the horizontal and vertical contraries of human nature in a way that man is not. Moreover, Balthasar theorizes about this on the authority of his interpretation of the second Genesis story, sex and reproduction.

By contrast, Balthasar offers no corresponding reflection on man's dyadic nature as not only lover and spouse in relation to woman, but as father to the child. The only way Balthasar does attribute a dual character to man's essentially fruitful nature is in the male's (priestly) representation of God. This repeats his understanding of reproductive fruitfulness. Whereas the woman's fruitfulness is characterised by the 'inward' and 'more perduring' role of 'conception that actively bears to full term', the man provides an 'external, episodic function' which means his role is such that he 'merely represents a primal, creative principle which he himself can never *be*.'²²² Balthasar claims as an 'irrefutable assertion' in the sexual realm that

woman is the full explication of the dignity bestowed on the creature of being a second causality alongside, in and through God. Because of this, furthermore, woman enjoys the role of being the world's comprehensive answer to God. The role of the man consequently acquires a peculiarly open bipolarity where woman's role exhibits a closure: as a representative of the Creator God, the man is more than himself, and yet, at the same time, as a mere transmitter who can as such *only* represent, he is also less than himself.²²³

Balthasar sees the inability of the male to be either a suitable analogue for the active receptivity of created being or the activity of divine being as characterising male *esse*'s uniquely representative role vis-à-vis the divine. There is a 'clear opposition' between '(masculine) representation and (feminine) conception that actively bears to full term.'²²⁴ This claims too much of woman and too little of man, while using this imbalance as an arbitrary justification for excluding woman from

²²¹ *TD3*, 293.

²²² Hans Urs von Balthasar, epilogue to *Woman in the Church* by Louis Bouyer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979), 113.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 114.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

representing God.²²⁵ Woman is defined based on her immanent focus on the child and orientation towards fulfilling male sexual fruitfulness. By contrast, man is disengaged from the woman's fulfilment and the new child. Indeed, this reads as a divine warrant for male failure to engage within the task of handing on the form of human nature in childcare. This splinters the reciprocity that underpins the unity of human nature. It leaves man in abstract isolation disengaged from the concrete interpersonal process of handing on *esse* which is left to women and children. Worse, their interaction is appropriated by the isolated and abstract male for his fulfilment.

7.6. Balthasar's misappropriation of the womb and denigration of the heart

Balthasar implicitly acknowledges the paucity of the account as offered above by asserting that every human, whatever their sex, is, metaphysically-speaking, feminine. Thus,

insofar as every creature – be it male or female in the natural order – is originally the fruit of the primary, absolute, self-giving divine love, there is a clear analogy to the female principle in the world.... [T]he analogy goes farther: if the creature is to be God's "image", it must be equipped with its own fruit-bearing principle, just like the woman (*vis-à-vis* the man).²²⁶

Ostensibly, this mitigates how the male is solely active, monadic, primary, isolated and somehow outside the constitutive reciprocity of human sexual difference and the contrariety that obtains between parents and child. Male activity should enact the activity receptivity that characterises created being. The problem is that Balthasar identifies this univocally with feminine active receptivity in reproductive terms. In the relationship between God and the creature, even though the latter is 'at an infinite remove from God', it is 'equipped with an organ of fruitful receptivity' and so can respond to God 'in a feminine mode.'²²⁷ It is difficult to see how this does not simply equate creation with the female and God with the male. Furthermore, this becomes the measure for human personal being: personhood becomes a receptive 'space-making, turning the self into a place in which the other may become – just the vision of femininity that masculinism most hopes to enact.'²²⁸ The male must abstractly and wilfully appropriate the female way of being fruitful. This, however, deprives woman of her distinctive way of being. Furthermore, Balthasar precludes women

²²⁵ Cf., Robert A. Pesarchick, *The Trinitarian Foundation of Human Sexuality as Revealed by Christ according to Hans Urs von Balthasar: The Revelatory Significance of the Male Christ and the Male Ministerial Priesthood* (Rome: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 2000). The latter defends the male-only Roman Catholic priesthood by accepting as unproblematic Balthasar identification of the female with receptivity. Cf., Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 54n.54.

²²⁶ *TD3*, 287.

²²⁷ *TD3*, 351.

²²⁸ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 48.

from appropriating male activity in any positive sense.²²⁹ As Beattie notes, men can be uniquely masculine and feminine, but women can only be feminine and, then, at the service of men.²³⁰ Tonstad concurs, adding that men can ‘become feminine...without losing their primacy or their fullness. Their emptiness is only symbolic, because their fullness has feminine space, feminine wombs, and feminine bodies in which to realize itself.... Only the biological woman remains feminine throughout...’²³¹

Balthasar links the womb-like active receptivity of the human created spirit, moreover, to the act of philosophical contemplation. This involves an attitude receptive to the essence of things. Balthasar contrasts this to ‘the masculine element’ which enacts a calculating and utilitarian approach which involves pushing ‘forward into things in order to change them by implanting and imposing something of its own.’²³² As Balthasar continues,

the philosophical attitude of letting oneself be gifted and fructified by nature and being is not feminine in the mere sense of receptivity. A forward-moving way of thinking certainly reigns in the attitude: one which, like the fructified womb, is of course able to bear patiently the seeds received and give birth to them in images, myths and concepts. In the contemplating intellect, the active element of the feminine principle is wedded to the passive element of the masculine (which needs the self-bestowing power of the womb in order to be able to give) in the best possible way.²³³

This repeats Balthasar’s problematic view that in sexual intercourse the woman is passive and active in her receptivity insofar as a child is conceived. Furthermore, the identification of contemplation with a receptively active womb raises an important question in light of the last chapter. What Balthasar says about the womb matches his account of the heart’s childlike wonder-filled attunement to being’s beauty.

Granting that Balthasar is using the language of the heart and womb in metaphorical and metaphysical terms, and not merely biological, what is their relationship? And, which of these metaphysical organs should be given priority vis-à-vis fruitful human interaction with being? The force of this thesis’ argument is to allot priority to both yet differently. Thus, the womb has a priority insofar as it brings a newly conceived human into being and shapes their human existence. The

²²⁹ Cf., Gonzalez, “Balthasar And Contemporary Feminist Theology,” 591.

²³⁰ Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 114-115; 196-197.

²³¹ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 45-46.

²³² *NE*, 189

²³³ *NE*, 189.

heart's childlike wonder, by contrast, has priority because it applies without remainder to every human as self-conscious embodied spirit; whereas a fruitful womb concerns mature female reproductive fruitfulness. Nevertheless, as explored in the next section, there is an intrinsic, albeit asymmetrical, relationship between the fruitfulness of the heart and the womb, insofar as each person's heart is first shaped within both the womb and their mother's heart in her openness to being.

8. Re-conceiving Male and Female Fruitfulness

I offer now a speculative alternative rendition of male and female fruitfulness. While this sits critically to Balthasar's account as examined above, I echo his concern to safeguard 'the equal dignity of man and woman, so that the extreme oppositeness of their functions may guarantee the spiritual and physical fruitfulness of human nature.'²³⁴ I affirm how male and female humanity, as extreme substantial limits that constitute human nature, distinctively and together generatively enact the analogy of being in their shared organic and personal fruitfulness vis-à-vis the fruit of a new child. While keeping the whole reality of human sexual fruitfulness and the child-parent relationship in view, I consider, how male and female jointly enact the letting be of *esse* according to how they differently hand on the immanent transcendence and transcendent immanence of human nature's form.

For this, I adapt Balthasar's reference to how female fruitfulness is characterised by inward conception and actively bearing to term; and male fruitfulness by externality. This echoes Aristotle's view of the male as one who generates in another and the female as one who generates within herself and out of whom a child comes to being. As Schindler identifies, there is a direct proportion between more intensive forms of reproduction and care for the young, and more extensive difference between the sexes.²³⁵ This proportion increases the higher the level of organisms involved. Thus, in humans the greater transcendence of living spiritual form and its immanence to matter means there is a greater extensive difference between the sexes which underscores a greater intensity of reciprocal sharing of that form. Greater intensive reproduction and nurture does not, therefore, just mean greater receptivity. It also indicates a greater shared activity between the sexes in handing on living form. Also, simply because the female bears a new child within her during pregnancy does not exclude male input into nurture's intensive aspect. This would isolate the male from the living form he shares with the female and child. Indeed, the spiritual nature of human form

²³⁴ *NE*, 195.

²³⁵ Schindler, "Perfect Difference," 213.

makes the intensive and extensive aspects greater still. The greater intensiveness relates to how the response of each person's heart and freedom within material reality underpins the handing on of spiritual form from parents to child. Equally, this personal freedom underpins a greater extensiveness in the difference between persons. Human reproduction and nurture most fully involve handing on *esse* in the immanent transcendence of spiritual nature as loving interpersonal gift. The task now is to consider this with respect to human male and female fruitfulness.

To clarify, in approaching the latter through the lens of reproduction and nurture of children, I am not suggesting that these activities offer a comprehensive essential definition of female and male humanity. Nevertheless, I am seeking to examine what can and must be said about female and male fruitfulness in light of the unique metaphysical fruit of a child. In other words, I claim the latter does indeed reveal something paradigmatic about male and female fruitfulness. What is thus manifested represents a metaphysical minimum. Yet, this does not mean that what is unveiled about the metaphysical reality of male and female fruitfulness is exclusively tied to having children. Rather, it will take on a rich diversity of analogous expressions inflected through dramatic encounters between actual persons and the creative use of their freedom in a variety of cultural contexts.²³⁶

8.1. Female fruitfulness and the mother-child relationship

The distinctive characteristic of a woman's female fruitfulness vis-à-vis a newly conceived child is that it begins with an inward, tightly knit identity between the unborn child and mother. There is, moreover, an identity between the mother's spiritual and organic fruitfulness. This reflects how a mother's entire being is an active crucible for how *esse* attains subsistence as a child and mediates to the child the material immanence of transcendent living spiritual form. Such inwardness is, however, oriented towards the transcendence of form expressed extensively in the relationship between mother and child, and their relationships to the child's father. Female fruitfulness follows, therefore, a distinctive order from inwardness and difference-in-identity to outward-ness and identity-in-difference; from the immanence of transcendent spiritual living form in the embodied identity of mother and child to this form's transcendence beyond matter but where this transcendence is expressed immanently in the concrete relationship between mother, child, and father.

This matches Balthasar's emphasis on the actively receptive character of female fruitfulness. As argued earlier, Balthasar errs when he reduces woman to being receptive to the male and a means

²³⁶ In chapter four, I explore the implications of this for how male and female differently manifest being's beauty.

to fulfil his fruitfulness. But we can affirm with Balthasar that in ‘the conception of a child the woman’s organism is just as active as the man’s. Indeed, by reason of the long pregnancy, birth, the stages of feeding, and subsequent child care on the mother’s part, we could say that the woman exhibits an activity which is significantly superior to the man’s.’²³⁷ To reiterate the point made above, I disagree with this insofar as it univocally identifies the female with childbirth and nurture. But I concur to the extent it articulates the minimum of what is revealed about the distinctively female way of being fruitful as disclosed in relation to having children. Thus, I affirm how Balthasar implicitly links the superiority of female fruitfulness vis-à-vis a child with an organic fruitfulness that intrinsically mediates spiritual fruitfulness. Moreover, as the child grows and is born, the spiritual is increasingly distinguished from, yet increasingly informs and transforms the organic. Simultaneously, the inwardness and identity that marks the beginning of female fruitfulness develops into a growing sense of difference between the child and mother, where the difference works towards forming the bond of unity between them. Taken together, this growth in both the unity-in-difference between organic and spiritual fruitfulness and the identity-in-difference between mother and child coincides with the reciprocity of love proper to persons.

This chimes with Balthasar’s claim that spiritual or personal fruitfulness comes more naturally to female fruitfulness. Balthasar’s identification of female fruitfulness with the fruitful active receptivity of created being is, therefore, no mere assertion. Rather, female fruitfulness is more predisposed to this than male fruitfulness because of how female organic fruitfulness already mediates the spiritual vis-à-vis a newly conceived child. Furthermore, Balthasar sees the interweaving of organic and spiritual female fruitfulness in dramatic and historical terms of becoming: ‘she requires a certain span of time in order to develop from a receptive bridge into a mother who gives birth to her child, nourishes it and brings it up.’²³⁸ Female fruitfulness is dramatically actualised and personally appropriated across time. This development is not simply effected by organic changes in the woman vis-à-vis her child and her response to this. It is impacted by her relationships to others including, especially the child’s father, immediate family and friends, the community, culture and society where she lives, and what meaning these various spheres of existence attribute to the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, motherhood, childcare and childhood – which touches upon the question of goodness and truth, matters I explore in the next chapter.

There is some self-evident truth, therefore, to what Balthasar states about the superior nature of the receptive activity of female fruitfulness in bearing a child. The mother in her receptivity to the

²³⁷ *NE*, 213.

²³⁸ *TD3*, 294.

unborn child actively gives both of her body and whole person. Though spiritual this is not initially a conscious decision but a response enabled by the child's objective being. This coincides with Balthasar's account of the asymmetrical reciprocity of the heart's *a priori* attunement to being as it appears in objects of perception. That it concerns first the heart, and not simply the intellect or will, accords with a spiritual fruitfulness mediated by organic fruitfulness. Yet even at an early stage this involves an increasingly willing receptivity, most obviously articulated in the mother's willingness to bear the child to term. What is peculiar to the female heart is how a mother responds to being as encompassed within her as a new human life. Her heart's attunement is not primarily mediated by sight or sound, but hidden feeling.²³⁹ Balthasar notes how this develops obliquely at first on the sensory level according to a certain order. '[It...] begins with a blind sense of touch, with the bodily sensing of a presence... – the sense of touch as the fundamental, unerring sense – and this experience intensifies first within its own particular kind before it extends to embrace also the experience of seeing and hearing which comes with the birth.'²⁴⁰ The mediation of the spiritual occurs, therefore, not only within the mother's body but her heart's receptively active attunement to the child's being and being itself.

This has implications for how the mother's heart shapes her child's heart. What Balthasar says about a child's self-consciousness immediately after birth is illuminative: 'the gradual separation into two of the one natural consciousness of the body at that stage when the mother's consciousness still embraces both bodies.... The mother is still both herself and her child. And her feeling of the child still wholly encompasses within itself her being felt by the child....'²⁴¹ The reference to the mother's feeling-while-being-felt, and the intense blind touch mentioned above, coincides with Balthasar's metaphysical understanding of the heart's attunement. During pregnancy, the child's slumbering heart is awake not in itself but within the maternal heart's attunement to being. This encompasses, as mentioned in the previous chapter, how an unborn child's nature is mysteriously active as spirit from the beginning and how the child awakens to itself as spirit in 'the common flesh of mother and child.'²⁴² The child's heartfelt attunement to being is mediated by the mother's heart in way analogous to how the child's flesh is received from her where this actively mediates to the child its transcendent human form. That the mother's active feeling of her child already shapes the child's

²³⁹ For a phenomenological engagement with maternal experiences of the hidden yet emerging presence of an unborn child based on Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, see James Mumford, *Ethics at the Beginning of Life: A Phenomenological Critique*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁴⁰ *GL1*, 339.

²⁴¹ *GL1*, 339

²⁴² *MTG*, 21-22.

receptive feeling of being anticipates and prepares for the post-birth encounter with the mother's concrete love which awakens the child to self-consciousness.

The above suggests the unborn child is impacted not just by the mother's biological and psychological state during pregnancy, but also her spiritual and metaphysical state.²⁴³ Although shrouded in mystery, even in the womb love's presence or absence is significant to the developing child's heart as a matter of ontological reality. Concretely, it matters whether the mother considers the unborn child a divine gift or not. This hangs not simply on the woman's choice but her heart's exposure to the surrounding world and the prevailing metaphysical attitude to being. Moreover, the mother's female fruitfulness, organic and personal, is informed by her interpersonal relationship with others, particularly the child's father, wider family, culture, and community. A particularly significant influence is the legacy of how her childhood relationship to her parents shaped the responsiveness of her childlike heart to being as divine gift.

The growth that is directed to an increase both in the identity-in-difference between mother and child, and the mother's spiritual fruitfulness, reaches a culmination and crisis point, first, in the physical separation at birth; and, then, the interpersonal difference fully manifested in the child's awakening to self-consciousness. After birth, and prior to the child's awakening to self-consciousness, the identity-in-difference between the child and mother continues to emerge within the realm of shared feeling where the mother can be actively receptive toward the child, while the child is receptive in its unselfconscious activity and dependency. Furthermore, while mother and child have grown together in a shared hidden feeling, at birth the mother encounters the child as external to her with sound, sight, taste and smell, and touch. Moreover, she gives of her body in new ways, particularly, through breastfeeding and nurturing touch. This is contiguous with how the mother's organic fruitfulness mediates spiritual and personal fruitfulness. Balthasar speaks of a 'spiritual handing-on, which takes place simultaneously with the bodily gift of mother's milk and motherly care.... For being-in-the-flesh always means receiving from others.'²⁴⁴ Amid the ongoing organic expression of fruitfulness, the mother can relate in a fully free way to the child as a distinct person, even as her self-consciousness continues to encompass them both.

²⁴³ Cf., the notion of quickening where the ensoulment of an unborn child coincides with the mother's first perception of movement in the womb. This is often wrongly attributed to Aristotle as adopted by Aquinas but has later origins. Aristotle holds ensoulment occurs at conception; Aquinas holds it occurs in a series of successive stages culminating in God infusing the spiritual soul. See Kathleen J. Austin, "Aristotle, Aquinas, And The History of Quickening," (Masters' Thesis, McGill University, 2003), 69-75.

²⁴⁴ *TD3*, 177.

After the child's birth, not only is the difference between the mother and child intensified but so is the mother's capacity consciously to experience the loving bond or identity-in-difference between them as one of freedom-in-dependency. This unity now coincides with the irreducible difference between mother and child where the child has its source in its parents' sexual difference, and, beyond this, God. The identity-in-difference between mother and child shows itself, moreover, to be a bond capable of subsisting across distance. This provides the context for the child to be born as self-conscious spirit. 'The child at its mother's breast is...something of a repetition of their bond while in the womb. And yet this unity in love persists even when the mother's face smiles at the child at a distance. Here is where the miracle occurs that one day the child will recognize in its mother's face her protective love and will reciprocate this love with a first smile.'²⁴⁵ The intimacy between mother and child is not discarded after birth but encompassed within a loving union where the bodily context allows the spiritual to come into concrete subsistence. Only in the intimacy of their pre-existing union can the child's difference be affirmed. Hence, the child 'awakens at the love of the Thou, as it has always slept in the womb and on the bosom of the Thou.'²⁴⁶ It is in the intimate identity-in-difference between mother and child that Balthasar locates the event of the child's awakening where it responds as an 'I' to a 'Thou'. At birth, and even more at the birth of self-consciousness, this surfaces in its full spiritual significance as an encounter of mutual love yet according to a pattern of subordination. The child, while awakened fully as embodied spirit, is utterly dependent on its mother and others' love whereby it receives the capacity to respond as a person.

As examined in the previous chapter, although Balthasar affirms that an archetypal identity-in-difference obtains between mother, father and child, he focuses mostly on the mother and child. This is also his preferred context for considering the child's awakening to self-consciousness. We can now see this as relating to how the child comes concretely into being and has its heart attuned to being in the mother's womb and in the child's utter dependence on her after birth. Similarly, after birth the child's heartfelt response to the mother's smile is where the fruitfulness of the self-giving love between parents comes into embodied and spiritual subsistence. While in this instance, the mother's concrete gesture is characterised more fully by her deliberate self-gift than during pregnancy; nevertheless, her smile too is rooted in her bodily reality and manifests the openness and response of the mother's heart which calls to and moves the child's heart.

All this indicates how a child is fruit in several senses: first, the fruit of the sexual act of its parents; secondly, the fruit of its mother's womb; thirdly, the fruit of the mother's heart where the latter is

²⁴⁵ *UBC*, 17.

²⁴⁶ *GL5*, 616.

shaped by the relationship to others, not least the child's father; fourthly, the child is also the fruit of the self-giving love between the parents, or in absence of one or other parents, other parent-like adults; and, finally, taken together, this encompasses how human parents mediate *esse* to their child as a matter of gift and how the child is, as embodied spirit, in both its ultimate origin and destiny, the fruit of divine love, a child of God entrusted to others and dependent on their love. This recalls the importance of father-mother and father-child relationship for ensuring the archetypal identity-in-difference between the parents and the child is one that affirms the child's difference as unique personal being where the parents do this by enacting their childlike dependence on God.

8.2. Male fruitfulness and the father-child relationship

In considering male fruitfulness, I take aim at Balthasar's failure to recognise that male fruitfulness also develops in the father-child relationship.²⁴⁷ I contend that there is an analogy between female and male fruitfulness which resists Balthasar's insistence that all humans should be receptive in a (abstract) feminine sense. Rather, at the outset, there exists a certain symmetry regarding male and female fruitfulness in the sexual act when it is enacted in a fully spiritual and embodied manner that Balthasar fails to recognise. Man and woman both exhibit an active receptivity that may lead to the conception of a child. After conception, Balthasar affirms, rightly, the superior activity of the mother's female organic fruitfulness regarding the gestating child. Yet he also curiously stresses that the father's organic fruitfulness retains primacy as having actualised the mother's fruitfulness. 'Such an order of things holds true even if we may smile at the incidental, marginal and transitory character of the male's function in procreation.... But it still remains true that the absolute beginning lies in the progenitor – in the father – while the feminine principle, even as Magna Mater or as Mother Nature, can never be conceived simply as the beginning.'²⁴⁸ This is patently false as the beginning lies with both parents. That said, male fruitfulness does safeguard the child's distinct identity vis-à-vis the mother. As Balthasar notes, if absolute significance is attributed to the mother-child relationship, 'it leads to the cults of the Magna Mater, the principle of reproductive fruitfulness – often depicted with an array of breasts – understood as the ultimate Source. But such a perspective...reduces the principle of male fruitfulness to insignificance and destroys the authentic polarity...'²⁴⁹ Tellingly, Balthasar makes no mention of phallic cults.²⁵⁰ To correct this, we need to

²⁴⁷ I echo Kilby's observation that, for Balthasar, 'the bearing and raising of a child is...consistently construed as, after the point of insemination, almost entirely the mother's doing.' *Balthasar*, 138n.35.

²⁴⁸ *NE*, 216-217.

²⁴⁹ *TD3*, 292-293.

²⁵⁰ See Beattie, "Sex, Death and Melodrama," 164; and, *New Catholic Feminism*, 129. Cf., Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 48.

affirm that both male and female have a certain primacy and subordination in actualising each other's fruitfulness vis-à-vis a child.

Compared to the mother's intensive fruitfulness, the father's fruitfulness is characterised by outwardness and difference between the father and child even as they share the same form in its intrinsic relationship to matter. This reflects how a child is conceived outside the male body, is not dependent on the father's organic fruitfulness, nor held hidden within the father's consciousness. While there is nothing comparable to a woman's act of bearing the child, this does not, however, justify Balthasar's reduction of male fruitfulness to episodic and disengaged terms.²⁵¹ Rather, the father's male separateness underpins how the transcendence of spiritual form is shared immanently in the common flesh of mother, father and child. The externality of male organic fruitfulness also underwrites the child's difference from its mother and the direction of the growth of this personal difference between them, even as the mother actively shares with the child the intrinsic relationship between spiritual living form and matter in her womb and heart.

To develop this further, at first, there is asymmetry between the mother and father's experience of the archetypal identity-in-difference with their newly conceived child. The father's relation to the child is inverse to the mother's. He is physically separated from the child growing in the mother's womb. While the father can be actively and receptively engaged with the child's mother, he is restrained regarding the child in her womb. There is no equivalent for male fruitfulness to how the response of the woman's body to the child within her shapes and is enveloped in her heartfelt response. Unlike the woman, there is no organic substrate that binds father and child wherein the spiritual fruitfulness is latently expressed and actualised over time.

Hence, in addition to physical distance, there is a difference between the organic and the spiritual in the father's male fruitfulness. The separation between father and newly conceived child, however, is no disconnection if seen through the lens of spiritual fruitfulness. Balthasar recognises this, but problematically: 'the man...*ought* not only give *something* of what is his but must rather surrender *his very self*....'²⁵² However, Balthasar makes this self-giving about an act of will. This divorces the male's response from his heart's openness to being as it appears in the mother and child. This is laid bare when Balthasar asserts male self-giving requires 'a supernatural measure of selflessness'; indeed, '[m]an *needs* woman in order to release and satisfy himself, even though he may also feel the impulse of love.... In love, as in fidelity, the woman has an easier time of it.'²⁵³ Male spiritual

²⁵¹ TD5, 86.

²⁵² NE, 219.

²⁵³ NE, 220-221.

fruitfulness collapses into untethered sexual desire, negatively construed, and woman becomes merely the means to minimal sexual release whereas the child is not mentioned. Moreover, Balthasar links this spiritual helplessness with the uniquely male representative vis-à-vis God. He asserts 'woman is not called upon to represent anything that she herself is not, while the man has to represent the very source of life, which he can never *be*.'²⁵⁴ This is misplaced. Man and woman together represent the source of life in the realm of secondary causality.

This questionable perspective is not the only one Balthasar offers. As mentioned earlier, Balthasar stresses the metaphysical significance of parental wonder. If we consider the father's relation to the new-born child in this light, there is a greater likeness to the mother's experience albeit according to a different order. The father's spiritual fruitfulness is not simply a matter of his wilful self-giving yet disengaged activity. It concerns the intensive receptivity of the father's heart to the child and mother's being. The man must willingly allow the spiritual fruitfulness of his heart's openness to the gift of new being to mediate his organic fruitfulness understood not as direct nourishment but his embodied interactions with the mother, the child once it is born, and, more broadly, the home he shares with them. Rather than consigning male fruitfulness to the background, this accentuates the father's response to the mother and their shared communication of *esse* according to their spiritual being's transcendent form. Furthermore, the father's distinctive wholehearted acts are mediated to the child in the womb through the movement of the mother's heart. As with female spiritual fruitfulness, male spiritual fruitfulness vis-à-vis the child and mother coincides with his interaction with the surrounding world. It is shaped by the values and expectations of the community, culture and society where mother, father and child live, and their understanding of God and being. It also depends on the parental and cross-generational relationships that have shaped the father's heart as a child.

In this, the direction and order of how male fruitfulness engages with the child is opposite to that of female fruitfulness. The original distance between father and child must grow into a greater sense of identity, or identity-in-difference, between them, as must the relationship between organic and spiritual fruitfulness. Only thus can the father actively mediate to the child the transcendence of living spiritual form where this relies on the spiritual fruitfulness the father actively shares with the mother and which allows both parents to actively tend to the growth of the child in organic and personal terms. The father must allow his heart to follow his organic fruitfulness to effect this mediation. This transpires first via the relationship between the child's father and mother, and then is shared by them more concretely once the child is born. Here the child's difference from both

²⁵⁴ Balthasar, "Epilogue," 113.

mother and father is more pronounced while at the same time allowing a greater unity between the child and the parents.

From birth onwards, the father can become more actively engaged based on his different bodily engagement with the child. Unlike the mother, the sensory encounter comes at once when the father encounters the child for the first time as a separate person. At that point, the father is set on a journey of discovering his bond with the child. This is a bond of the heart that abides beyond their difference, even as it has done obliquely during the separation that obtained while the child was in its mother's womb. The father's discovery of the identity-in-difference between him and the child reflects an awareness on his part of the distinct identity of the child, something which is rooted in the child's existence as coming not just from the mother and father but, beyond them both, from God.

8.3. Shared male and female fruitfulness

In contrast to Balthasar, the above stresses that the distinctiveness of male and female fruitfulness should not be correlated univocally to an ontologically-conceived feminine receptivity and masculine activity. From the viewpoint of substantial form, male and female hand on in different but reciprocal ways the transcendence and immanence of the spiritual living form of their common human nature to their child. They do so, moreover, dramatically from within the transcendence of the same form whereby they confront each other across the full span of the different ways of being human. Conversely, from the perspective of *esse*, male and female together but differently give subsistence to *esse's* pattern of activity and receptivity within the unity of human nature. This metaphysical reciprocity obtains not simply on the abstract level of substantial form and *esse*, therefore, but within the concrete *Gestalt* of how *esse* subsists according to the specific extreme limits of human nature as constituted by the relationships between male and female, and father, mother and child.

This coordinated metaphysical enactment of their shared fruitfulness is played out maximally according to the distinctive ways male and female hearts are attuned to the gift of their child and shape the child's heart within their relationship.²⁵⁵ What distinguishes them is the different way the active receptivity of the heart to *esse* is actualised according to the intensive (transcendent immanence) and extensive (immanent transcendence) nature of the parent's relationship to their child based on the differing relationships between their organic and spiritual fruitfulness. This is

²⁵⁵ Cf., *ST*, 2a.2ae.10.12: 'at first, it [the child] is not distinct from its parents as to its body, so long as it is enfolded within its mother's womb; and later on after birth, and before it has the use of its free-will, it is enfolded in the care of its parents, which is like a spiritual womb....' I would substitute the heart for spiritual womb.

manifested in how the mother and fathers' hearts respond to the child's new being first on the level of senses and body, and how they differently encounter and mediate the identity-in-difference between them and the child.

In contrast to Balthasar, this makes the period of pregnancy and childcare a significant time for both parents, not simply the mother. They can strengthen their mutual relationship in their love while they await and then encounter the wonder of the fruit of their self-giving love in the gift of a child. This places significance on the quality of the relationship between the parents and their familial and social milieu before, during and after the time of pregnancy; and how they respond to and share the differences in their enactment of their fruitfulness understood in both organic and personal terms. This impacts how mother and father respond in heartfelt love and support for each other, and the formation of the child's heart in the womb, immediately postpartum, and as the child is awakened to self-consciousness. Even in the womb, the child's heart stirs towards wakefulness as it participates in the attunement of its mother's heart and in how such maternal attunement is affected by her relationship with the father and the wider community.

Metaphysically-speaking, the time of waiting and welcoming a new child is one when the parents confront existence's fundamental character – whether they affirm the child's existence and being itself as a gift of fruitful self-giving love, and as a source of wholehearted wonder even in the face of a world characterised by anxiety and violence. This is not simply about intellectual reasoning and willed decision. Rather, paternal and maternal hearts undergo metaphysical tutelage as they attune to the ontological reality of their child's existence and ontological reality per se; something which Balthasar, in a reduction of the whole to a part, affirms only in the mother's historical development. This period of metaphysical learning brings into sharper relief the parents' relationship to God as the giver of the gift of being. Moreover, it is a time when they discover the metaphysical perfection of their sexual difference in the distinctive ways they mediate *esse* as it subsists in the transcendent living and spiritual form of human nature they share with their child. What is important is whether the parents allow the wonder of their hearts to come to fruition in their willing commitment to each other and the child, and how they communicate this in their shared life. As Balthasar says, in *UBC*, the child's

parents are obeying a duty when they assume the responsibility of caring for it. Especially in the case of the mother, but also of the father, this duty is contained within the original sphere of the concrete good, in which they are bound up with the child. They live out an obedience to the laws of existence that is inextricably united with fatherhood and

motherhood. But there is also involved a part of free willingness that has to be achieved through personal decision.²⁵⁶

It is notable that in this, his final work, Balthasar recognises more clearly the reciprocity between male and female fruitfulness. The reference to the concrete nature of the good shared between parents and child emphasises that the parents' duty is not simply a matter of willing an abstract good but expressing their encounter with being as good, true and beautiful. I explore this in chapter four.

9. Conclusion

For all their differences, male and female fruitfulness converge in that their spiritual fruitfulness is rooted in their heart's wonder-filled responsiveness to being, specifically as it greets them in the ontological singularity of their child. This heartfelt wonder is not principally feminine, nor simply masculine and feminine, but childlike. Mother and father are themselves always children, albeit grown-up, mature and responsible adult children. Their hearts, like that of their child's, are the fruit of human sexual difference, knit together in their mother's womb and shaped by her heart's attunement to the surrounding world, and awoken in wonder by their parents' love. This means that the metaphysical significance of human sexual difference and its organic and spiritual fruitfulness always remains, in a certain sense, subordinate to the objective reality of a new child and the subjective act of childlike wonder.

On the objective side, the subordination of the fruitful union of sexual difference to the child is a function of the child being the fruit of this union. Each child is by nature a new embodied spirit in whom the unique and ever-fruitful divine gift of *esse* subsists. No child is ever merely the product of the human sexual reproductive process or the love between the parents. A child is more than a mere biological reality or what humans can construct or will into being. Rather each child as spirit is a uniquely personal gift of God's loving being to which the *a priori* response of the heart is one of metaphysical wonder, even if this may be a wonder that is rejected, overlooked, or evokes despair. It is this response of the heart that places a demand on the adults who are charged with the care of the child to share being as loving gift. They must take responsibility for the child of their fruitfulness who is utterly dependent on them for its continued existence and its self-conscious freedom. In placing this ontological demand on them, the child calls forth from its parents their joint mediation

²⁵⁶ *UBC*, 20-21

of the transcendence of the spiritual living form they share, and, therefore, the creative letting be of *esse*.

Following on from this, on the subjective side, the call of the child demands that the parents give priority to their own abiding sense of filial obedience and childlike openness at the core of their self-conscious being. It demands they prioritise the childlikeness that characterises their pre-volitional and pre-intellectual wonder at the gift of being – the wonder that quickens their hearts' spiritual fruitfulness. The subordination of the parents' sexual and spiritual fruitfulness to that of childlike wonder recalls the *a priori* nature of the childlike wonder that constitutes the self-consciousness of each person. Now as adults who have become parents this requires that the childlike wonder of their hearts be integrated with their mature acts of intellectual and volitional freedom. This will take a different but correlated expression of intensive-extensive shared fruitfulness based on how each sex differently encounters the child's new being and plays its distinctive part in jointly handing on the transcendence and immanence of their shared spiritual living form.

On this speculative reading, Balthasar's metaphysics challenges both (his own) essentialist and constructivist positions based on their implicit or explicit rejection of the abiding value of childhood in favour of adult self-mastery and technological manipulation. Balthasar's metaphysics stands in stark contrast to any view that sees not only sexual difference, but also the child-parent relationship, as in some sense preliminary, inessential, deficient, and dispensable differences. Such views judge these relationships as problematic because they are prior to our free choosing and ability to reason and so should be abandoned, or, more radically, eliminated to allow us to assert our freedom unencumbered by any relationships of dependency not of our making. By contrast, Balthasar's understanding of the metaphysically-rooted convergence of the fruitfulness of sexual difference, the child-parent relationship and personhood, gives priority to the abiding value of the heart's childlikeness, the freedom that comes from interdependence and the readiness for wonder at being itself.

This reiterates the central claim in this thesis that childlikeness is not simply the primordial but also the abiding mode of fruitful personal existence which enacts the generative nature of the analogy of being in its character as divine gift. This would seem to suggest that being fruitful as a childlike adult person, in openness to being as divine gift, is more fundamental than the fruitfulness of human sexual difference. This in turn would open a way beyond the paradigmatic status of male and female fruitfulness. Just as each child is capable of being fruitful through sharing the personal gift of themselves, and so the gift of being, with others in heartfelt love; each adult too can be fruitful in a more than simply sexual way through sharing the personal gift of themselves with others in love

which is expressed in an adult commitment of the whole self in childlike openness. Whatever their sex, this affirms that each person can enact the interpersonal fruitfulness of being like a child as an adult.

And yet, it is this priority of the child and childlikeness to the fruitfulness of each person that demands a jointly fundamental metaphysical significance for the fruitfulness of sexual difference understood as the female and male poles of a contrariety that constitutes human nature's participation in *esse*. The priority of being a child cannot, therefore, be separated from being a child of sexual difference. Childlike fruitfulness is never something we simply possess independently, according to which we make ourselves. Rather, it is in its essence constituted and mediated by the fruitfulness of human sexual difference not just in conception but in how each person is shaped and formed by female and male organic and spiritual fruitfulness by being awoken to self-conscious freedom. This emphasises that the specific difference between male and female, as encompassing the perfect and complete difference of the analogy of being, and so the extremes of human existence and freedom, is crucial to safeguarding the reality each person's uniqueness as being born and remaining a child. More specifically, it safeguards the heart's capacity for childlike wonder in its openness to being's appearance in beings, and the spiritual fruitfulness that such heartfelt wonder underpins.

Chapter Four

Transcendental Fruitfulness

Balthasar's metaphysics supports the view that the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference are concrete principles of difference of created being itself. They are the correlated extreme modes of being fully human. Within the realm of secondary causality, they communicate the 'primal *Gestalt*' or 'native condition' of being an embodied spirit.¹ They constitute a being-from, -with, and -for others that enacts, within humanity spiritual embodied nature's self-transcending openness, being's superabundance. In this chapter, I argue this makes them paradigmatic for being's so-called transcendental aspects.

I draw on five aspects of Balthasar's metaphysical notion of the transcendentals. First, Balthasar structures his thought according to the 'positive relational transcendentals' of beauty, goodness and truth.² These are intrinsically related as a single whole according to a certain order. Their relational nature arises from their source in the relationship between being and the spiritual soul in its capacity to reflect being as a whole. Especially significant is the primacy Balthasar's gives beauty. Secondly, underlying this is the transcendental of unity understood as the real distinction between *esse* and *ens*, and so the unity-in-difference of the analogy of created being. Balthasar identifies this polar unity as marked by a vital tension that opens to the transcendent source of being in God. Unity is, for Balthasar, distinct from the relational transcendentals since it underpins and is articulated through them. This is no abstract unity-in-difference, therefore, but one manifested concretely in the encounter between subject and object via the positive relational transcendentals. Thirdly, Balthasar interprets this complex whole most fully as the reciprocity of love. Beauty, goodness, and truth are interrelated moments of love as the overarching transcendental of being and the fullest expression of being's unity-in-difference unveiled in the freedom of spirit. Conversely, love is not separable from or positioned alongside the other relational transcendentals, nor identified with only one of them, but is fully expressed as beauty, goodness and truth in their unity. Moreover, associating the transcendentals with love locates their fullest articulation in interpersonal reality. Fourthly, these aspects converge on fruitfulness as a transcendental. Balthasar does not explicitly make this claim but implicit in his thought is that fruitfulness inheres the relational transcendentals. While this fruitful excess is what being already fully is, nonetheless it also reflects how being

¹ *GL1*, 25, 21.

² D.C. Schindler, "Love and Beauty, The 'Forgotten Transcendental,'" *Communio: International Catholic Review* 44, (2017): 334. Cf., Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 220.

incorporates a dependence on the fruitful encounter of actual beings according to the relational transcendentals. Finally, this co-inherence of the relational transcendentals, unity, love and fruitfulness is, in created terms, enacted primordially, paradigmatically, but not exclusively, in the relationships between mother, father, and child. This recalls from the previous chapter how the form of human love has its provenance in the love offered by parents to a child born of sexual difference. For Balthasar, a child's awakening to self-consciousness through love is 'decisive proof' that the positive relational transcendentals are rooted in 'groundless love' as 'the supreme act of being.'³

Given the above, I argue being cannot be enacted as beautiful, good and true, and so as love, but for the child-parent relationship and human sexual difference. Specifically, I claim these relationships are co-principles of beauty itself. To this end, I consider, first, Balthasar's interpretation of the transcendentals; secondly, how the transcendentals, particularly beauty, relate to the fruitfulness of the human constitutive relationships; and, finally, I revisit, from the previous chapter, my critique of Balthasar's understanding of sexual difference and extend my speculative alternative in light of the transcendentals.

1. Medieval and Modern Perspectives on the Transcendentals

For Balthasar, the transcendentals 'are all-pervasive and, therefore, mutually immanent qualities of being as such.'⁴ This is in continuity with the medieval scholastic view of the transcendentals as properties of being. As Jan Aertsen shows, a theory of the transcendentals is not fully articulated until thirteenth century.⁵ Before this, notions of transcendence operate in earlier classical and Christian thought, yet concern aspects of reality that wholly transcend being understood variously as material reality, the categorical divisions of Aristotelian substance and accident, or created being. Thus, Plato affirms the relationship between the Good, True, Beautiful and One.⁶ Yet, he holds the Good transcends being as the ultimate principle which confers being and intelligibility upon beings.⁷ Neoplatonism applies this 'beyond being' to the One that transcends all being.⁸ Within Christianity, Augustine attributes the verb to transcend to both the ascent of the soul toward God and to God

³ TL2, 177n.9.

⁴ TL1, 15.

⁵ Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 28.

⁶ Plato, "Philebus," trans. Dorothea Frede, in *Complete Works*, 64a-65a.

⁷ Plato, "Republic," trans. G.M.A Grude and C.D.C Reeve, in *Complete Works*, 509b.

⁸ Plotinus, *The Ennead: Volume V*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1986), 5.6

whose essence transcends created being.⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius adapts Platonic notions such as the Good and Beautiful to express God's transcendence who is 'beyond all.'¹⁰

The scholastic sense of the transcendentals, however, identifies a transcendence proper to created being. It has roots in different albeit not fully developed aspects of Aristotle's metaphysics.¹¹ The scholastic innovation marks the advent of a concept of being as transcending the substantial and accidental categories of being. This is the metaphysical outworking of *creatio ex nihilo* where created being is divine gift.¹² While the scholastic period is marked by a diversity of interpretations of this sense of being, the upshot is that created being is understood to transcend all beings because it is universal and common to all, yet is not divine being. Rather, in this, its transcendental sense of transcendence, created being harkens towards but is distinct from the God's transcendent being.¹³

Being is the first transcendental because common to all beings.¹⁴ This transcendental sense of being's transcendence applies also to the properties of being that transcend the categories of substance and accident which all beings possess through their share in being's commonality. On the majority consensus these are unity, goodness and truth. While irreducible to the categories of finite beings, they apply to every being. They concern the basic way any being exists. As properties of being, moreover, they are convertible with each other. Here they are distinct not in reality (*secundum re*) but add a conceptual difference (*secundum rationem*) to being that is not merely superfluous.¹⁵ Across the diversity of medieval views, Aertsen distils the common scholastic perspective thus: 'transcendentals are the "firsts", since they are most common; and because of their commonness they transcend the categories [of substance and accident].'¹⁶

Beyond the medieval period, later modern developments interpreted the transcendentals as structures of the human perception, mind or will in their cognitive encounter and practical engagement with objects of human perception. As Aertsen notes, it is regarding truth 'that the complex process of the transformation of the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals to modern

⁹ Augustine, "Of True Religion," in *Earlier Writings*, trans. J.H.S. Burleigh (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1953), 72. Cf., Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 21-22.

¹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, "The Divine Names," in *The Complete Works* trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 5.8.

¹¹ Cf., Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 60-64.

¹² Cf., *Ibid.*, 672-680. Cf., Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), 74-107.

¹³ Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ E.g., *ST*, 1a.5.1; 2a.2ae.109.2 ad 1.

¹⁶ Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 657.

transcendental philosophy becomes apparent.¹⁷ Whereas truth had been seen as a relation between being and the intellect, it now becomes a product of the intellect.¹⁸ This reaches its zenith in the transcendentalism of Kant. Kant locates the transcendentals not as properties of being but of the possibility of knowing things and so within the *a priori* structures of the human mind and will.¹⁹ The human subject constitutes the objects of experience and provides the condition of the possibility of empirical truth.²⁰ This underpins transcendental Thomism and phenomenology.²¹

This lays the ground for Nietzsche's denial of the transcendentals in favour of the human will's power over the immanent order.²² As Balthasar notes, this flattens being, eviscerates its mystery, and hollows out the transcendentals based on the damage human freedom has inflicted on them: 'falsehood, malice, ugliness, and the elevation of a violent dualism to the level of a first principle seem to dominate man's world so thoroughly that anyone who can look all of this in the face...must dismiss the idea that being is true, good, and beautiful as a hopeless illusion. Existence is governed by the will to power, which uses the transcendentals to its best advantage.'²³ This echoes Heidegger's sense of being as mere contingent existence (*Dasein*, being-in-the-world).²⁴ The latter is framed ultimately as endless potential and possibility before the ever-present reality of death.²⁵ Being (*Sein*) is identified with nonbeing (*Nichtsein*) which is the condition for the possibility of transcendence. Transcendence here, however, is contained solely within the immanent frame where being's contingency is made into a transcendental of a thoroughly immanent sense of being-in-the-world which is 'held out into the nothing.'²⁶

As Schindler notes, these differing perspectives on the transcendentals betoken an ambiguity. Do they concern properties of being or our experience of being?²⁷ Given that Balthasar treats the transcendentals as properties of being, he sits within the medieval view. However, he also allots

¹⁷ Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 692.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 693.

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B114. Cf., *ibid.*, A11/B25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, B185.

²¹ *DST*, 352. Schindler examines how Balthasar challenges phenomenology's suspicion of metaphysics in both a Heideggerian and Husserlian register in Schindler, "Problem of Onto-Theology," 102-113; and, "Metaphysics within the Limits of Phenomenology: Balthasar and Husserl on the Nature of the Philosophical Act," *Teología y vida* 50, (2009): 243-258.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 822.

²³ *TL1*, 16.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 250.

²⁵ Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics*, 33, examines Balthasar's critique of Heidegger. Cf., Aidan Nichols, *Scattering the Seed: A Guide through Balthasar's Early Writings on Philosophy and the Arts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 204-205.

²⁶ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," 91.

²⁷ *DST*, 352. Cf., *GL4*, 411.

human freedom a pivotal role while avoiding a wholesale Kantian turn to the subject or Nietzschean will to power.²⁸ This is ensured by Balthasar's affirmation of an analogous freedom of the object which moves the subject in its freedom. Indeed, it is the concrete event of encounter between subject and object that characterises the transcendentals. Thus understood they supply the antidote to the lionisation of human power above being. The transcendentals are 'stronger than any human nihilism that would liquidate them and, with them, the being in which they inhere....'²⁹ As I examine, however, the transcendentals' indefatigability is paradoxically precarious, not least because of the primacy Balthasar gives to beauty and the paradigmatic role he allots to sexual difference and the child-parent relationship in safeguarding being's beautiful good truth.

Let us, however, turn back to the medieval understanding of the transcendentals that underpins Balthasar's approach. I focus on Aquinas' account in *De Veritate* for several reasons. First, this is a central text in the scholastic exposition of a theory of the transcendentals.³⁰ Secondly, Balthasar sits in continuity with Aquinas' analogical understanding of being in terms of *esse* and *ens* as the basis of the transcendentals.³¹ Indeed, for Balthasar, Aquinas' metaphysics underpins an approach to the transcendentals that accords primacy to beauty, even if Aquinas does not explicitly state this.³² Thirdly, Balthasar builds on Aquinas' innovative understanding of the transcendentals as the relationship between being and the spiritual soul. That said, Balthasar goes beyond Aquinas most principally in treating the relational transcendentals as differences inherent to being, not just conceptual differences.

Aquinas examines the very possibility of properties of being (*ens*) given that 'nothing can be added to being as though it were something not included in being.'³³ Aquinas argues there are non-superfluous additions that articulate 'a mode of being not expressed by the term being.'³⁴ Being is more than mere being. Aquinas identifies two such additions. First, being is expressed as substance which specifies being as an actual being. The second way concerns the transcendentals.³⁵ These 'add

²⁸ John Dadsoky, "Philosophy for a Theology of Beauty," *Philosophy and Theology* 19, (2007): 7, queries whether Balthasar affirms the subject sufficiently to 'articulate the proper philosophical foundations for a modern recovery of beauty.' Dadsoky argues this requires going beyond Aquinas. Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics*, 48n.24, challenges this.

²⁹ *TL1*, 16-17.

³⁰ Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 211.

³¹ Cf., Cornelio Fabro, "The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 6, (1966): 404-407.

³² *GL4*, 407-41.

³³ *De Veritate*, 1.1.

³⁴ *De Veritate*, 1.1.

³⁵ Aquinas does not use the term *transcendentia* in *De Veritate*, 1.1. but in 21.3.

to being because the mode they express is one that is common, and consequent upon every being.³⁶

Aquinas lists five transcendentals: *res*, *unum*, *aliquid*, *bonum* and *verum*. These divide into two groups. Firstly, *res* and *unum* concern how each being is in itself. Thus, positively, each being is a thing (*res*). It has an essential reality. Negatively, each being is undivided in itself and so is one (*unum*). Secondly, the remaining three transcendentals concern how every being is related to what is other.³⁷ Negatively, each being is something (*aliquid*) in distinction to others. This expresses how unity (*unum*) entails multiplicity.³⁸ As Aquinas says elsewhere: 'Multitude belongs to the transcendentals, insofar as being is divided by the one and the many.'³⁹ Positively, therefore, each being has a positive relation to another. This concerns 'the correspondence one being has with something other'. To clarify, this concerns not the relationship between any two beings, but the relationship of being, as it subsists in every being, to something other than itself. Aquinas, following Aristotle, identifies this as the spiritual/rational soul which alone agrees in some way with all things (*quodammodo est omnia*).

In *De Veritate*, Aquinas identifies two such positive relational transcendentals: the true (*verum*) and the good (*bonum*). This reflects the two different spiritual powers of the soul which relates to being simply as intelligible and desirable. The true encompasses the relationship between being and the intellect; and, the good the relationship between being and the will or appetitive power. We can note that beauty is not on Aquinas' list of transcendentals in *De Veritate*. Indeed, it is questioned whether beauty is recognised as a transcendental in medieval thought.⁴⁰ There are similar queries about beauty in Aquinas' thought.⁴¹ Whereas in *De Veritate* Aquinas lists five transcendentals in

³⁶ *De Veritate*, 1.1.

³⁷ *De Veritate*, 1.1.

³⁸ Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 682-683.

³⁹ *ST*, 1a.30.3.

⁴⁰ For an overview, see Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 298n.3. Étienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday, 1960) 159-163, calls beauty a 'forgotten transcendental.' Aertsen denies beauty's status as a transcendental in medieval thought. See Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 175-176. Indeed, Aertsen criticises Balthasar for reading nineteenth century aesthetics into thirteenth century thought. *Ibid.*, 168-169, 175. He challenges how these modern thinkers prioritize an isolated Franciscan text, *Tractatus de transcendentalibus entis conditionibus*, which some attribute to a young Bonaventure. Balthasar refers to this text in *GL4*, 373 though he does not unequivocally attribute it to Bonaventure. See *GL2*, 260n.1, 334, and *GL4*, 383. Stephan van Erp, *The Art of Theology: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics and the Foundations of Faith* (Leuven: Peters, 2004), 138, accuses Balthasar of merely asserting beauty's importance.

⁴¹For those in favour, see Francis Kovach, *Die Ästhetik des Thomas von Aquin: Eine genetische und systematische Analyse* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1961); Czapiewski, *Das Schöne bei Thomas von Aquin*; Günther Pöltner, *Schönheit: Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung des Denkens bei Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg: Herder, 1978); and, Jacques Maritain, *Art et scholastique* (Paris: Librairie de l'Art Catholique, 1947). Aertsen is against. See Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 172-174; and, Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the*

subsequent tradition the number reduces to three, unity, truth and goodness. This reflects how *res* is incorporated in to being, and *aliquid* into *unum*. As Aertsen charts, this represents being's univocalisation understood in increasingly abstract essential terms (albeit beyond categorical being) against Aquinas' emphasis on *esse's* actuality.⁴² As we will see, Balthasar resists this in favour of an analogical view that affirms the abiding unity-in-difference between *res* and *esse*, and *unum* and *aliquid*.

An important point to highlight is how the positive relational transcendentals, namely, the true and the good (and by implication the beautiful as Balthasar employs it), encompass, what Schindler calls, the 'transcendental paradox.'⁴³ This concerns how the positive relational transcendentals denote the way being inherently points beyond itself to what is other than being (the will and the intellect of the soul); yet, there is nothing other than being. Though paradoxical this is no irrational contradiction. It follows from the soul's capacity to reflect the whole of being and so transcend being while depending on being.⁴⁴ The spirit thus fully encompasses within itself being's own excess. Although Aquinas does not develop this point, goodness and truth are, therefore, not simply conceptual differences, but relate to the otherness inherent to being (that is, *aliquid* and *multitudo*) as reflected in the spiritual soul's own transcendent capacity to encompass being as whole.⁴⁵ Anticipating Balthasar, being thus paradoxically depends on the soul to manifest fully what it already is: a unity-in-difference that always already exceeds itself. The soul alone unveils the full meaning of being's superabundance as truth and goodness. Schindler labels this 'the anthropological deduction' which he considers one of Aquinas' 'most innovative contributions' to the question of the transcendentals. It introduces 'anthropology into what was previously simply a metaphysical or theological issue.' This entails 'a noble risk' insofar as it allows humanity to shape the basic meaning of being, carrying with it 'the threat of the subordination of reality to human projects that arguably becomes real in the Enlightenment.'⁴⁶ This innovation in metaphysics lies at the core of Balthasar's notion of metaphysics as meta-anthropology.

Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 335-359. At GL4, 393, Balthasar is circumspect about whether Aquinas recognises beauty as a transcendental. In GL4, 407-41, however, Balthasar argues Aquinas' metaphysics underscores the emergence of a 'transcendental aesthetics.'

⁴² Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 679-680, charts how Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus and Francisco Suárez identify being (*ens*) principally with a quidditative notion of being.

⁴³ *DST*, 351.

⁴⁴ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 303

⁴⁵ Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy*, 683, rejects this interpretation arguing multitude concerns beings not being, and represents a different kind of transcendental. *Pace* Aertsen, *multitudo* is compatible with the relational transcendentals. They explicate an otherness intrinsic to *esse* as it subsists as *ens* and fully articulated in spirit.

⁴⁶ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 302.

2. Balthasar's Account of the Transcendentals

The transcendentals are central to Balthasar's metaphysical thought.⁴⁷ He understands them as universal to every being: 'The One, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, these are what we call the transcendental attributes of Being, because they surpass all the limits of essences and are co-extensive with Being.'⁴⁸ Balthasar's understanding of the relational transcendentals, moreover, follows Aquinas' insight that being comes fully to light as the spiritual soul. 'Though the transcendentals pervade all being, even subspiritual being, they first attain their fullness where being, lighting up within, becomes spirit.'⁴⁹ In contrast to Aquinas, Balthasar approaches this relationship between being and spirit not so much from the perspective of the soul's individual faculties and their relationship to being, but from within the encounter between the whole concrete human person and being as it appears concretely in beings.⁵⁰

For Balthasar, more explicitly than Aquinas, the transcendentals concern not only how being's unity-in-difference is encountered by the spiritual soul, but being's nature so unveiled. This is captured by Balthasar's notion that being is epiphanic or expressive, developing Heidegger and Bonaventure.⁵¹ Beauty, goodness and truth denote being's 'epiphanic character, which permeates everything that exists....' This is a 'shining-out that recalls the illuminating action of the light. But this is only meaningful when we maintain the difference between appearance and that which appears, for appearance without something that appears empties its identity into mere seeming.'⁵² This rests on the affirmation that every 'being is a manifestation of itself (the more intensively the higher it ranks): the representation of its own depths, the surface of its ground, the word from its essential core; and upon this essential movement of being (from its interior to the exterior) are founded the good, the

⁴⁷ This is explored in Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité*.

⁴⁸ *MW*, 471.

⁴⁹ *TL2*, 176.

⁵⁰ Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité*, 109, notes the significance to Balthasar of a concrete approach to the transcendentals. Cf., *GL4*, 28-29.

⁵¹ That being is epiphanic reflects Balthasar's adaption of Heidegger's notion of truth as unveiling or *aletheia* and is connected to Balthasar's notion of expression. See, for example, *TL1*, 37-38 and *GL1*, 193. Cf., Martin Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings 2nd ed*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 178. Hence, Fergus Kerr labels Balthasar's thought as a 'Heideggerian Thomism.' Kerr, "Balthasar and Metaphysics," 237. For Bonaventure, see *GL2*, 260-362. Regarding the importance of *expressio* to the latter's notion of beauty, see *GL2*, 271, 335-352 and *TL2*, 165-170. On Bonaventure's importance to Balthasar, see Junius Johnson, *Christ and Analogy: The Christocentric Metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 31-74.

⁵² *E*, 83.

true, and the beautiful.⁵³ Balthasar thus re-envision the relational transcendentals as follows: being is self-showing (beautiful); self-giving (good); and, self-expressing or self-saying (true).⁵⁴

That Balthasar associates the transcendentals with differences in being's epiphanic nature maintains the paradoxical relationship between being and spirit. The transcendentals express being's already superabundant perfection within spirit's intrinsic openness to being's excess. This obviates any suggestion of a lack within being that is fulfilled by beings, particularly, by the development of spirit along Hegelian lines. As Balthasar says, 'the self-showing, self-bestowal, and self-expressiveness of finite things are not aspects that arise out of their need but belong to their essential ontological perfection.'⁵⁵ Accordingly, the dependence at the heart of the transcendentals and so every being belongs to being's perfection. This is a perfection, moreover, that because it subsists as the perfection of particular beings cannot dispense with them in favour of Heideggerian nonbeing.⁵⁶

Before considering Balthasar's understanding of the respective relational transcendentals, I shall explore how he affirms, first, their inseparability; secondly, their order; and, thirdly, the fruitfulness of being's polar unity which they articulate.

2.1. Circumcession of the relational transcendentals

Following the medieval tradition that the transcendentals are convertible with each other, Balthasar states, 'all the transcendentals equally determine the whole of being'; this underpins 'their inseparability, reciprocal interpenetration, and mutual implication.'⁵⁷ They are 'circumcessive.'⁵⁸ This is key to Balthasar's metaphysics. He insists that only the relational transcendentals in their unity unveil the truth of being's intrinsic richness.

[O]nly a permanent, living unity of the theoretical, ethical, and aesthetic attitudes can convey a true knowledge of being.... [I]t is necessary to keep in mind their common root and constant interplay. This interplay is so intimate that one cannot speak concretely about one of the three without drawing the other two into the discussion.⁵⁹

Developing the traditional perspective, for Balthasar, the convertibility of the transcendentals does not arise simply because what is one *in re*, being, is conceptually differentiated by the spiritual

⁵³ *GL1*, 610-611.

⁵⁴ *E*, 59-86.

⁵⁵ *E*, 85.

⁵⁶ Cf., Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 84.

⁵⁷ *TL1*, 7.

⁵⁸ *MW*, 116.

⁵⁹ *TL1*, 29. Cf., *ExT1*, 107.

faculties of the soul *in ratione*. Rather, being is characterised by a multifaceted unity-in-difference manifested fully in spirit. Each of the transcendentals is a distinct yet interrelated aspect of being's epiphany. They 'must be interior to each other: that which is truly true is also truly good and beautiful and one. A being *appears*, it has an epiphany: in that it is beautiful and makes us marvel. In appearing it *gives* itself, it delivers itself to us: it is good. And in giving itself up, it *speaks* itself, it unveils itself: it is true (in itself, but in the other to which it reveals itself).'⁶⁰

2.2. *The order of the transcendentals*

If the transcendentals concern how being reveals itself and is encountered, then Balthasar advocates an 'unusual sequence'.⁶¹ This represents another innovative contribution to metaphysics.⁶² While they interpenetrate, the order of beauty, goodness and truth is not arbitrary.⁶³ Balthasar sees this as an evolutionary hierarchy that reflects the scholastic gradation of being (being, living being, spiritual being). Here "'truth" forms the conclusion to "beauty" and "goodness"....'⁶⁴ Hence, the beautiful, as being's self-appearing, applies to all inanimate beings; goodness, as being's self-giving, occurs at the level of living, conscious being; and, truth, as being's self-saying, obtains at the level of self-conscious spiritual reality.⁶⁵ Truth emerges at the pinnacle of nature where being becomes self-conscious. Truth also depends on the preceding levels and fulfils them: 'without self-consciousness, even terms like "beautiful" and "good" can only be imperfect, preliminary natural steps leading to what they become in their full unfolding in man.'⁶⁶ That said, truth is not limited to the human. As Balthasar stresses, truth does not simply conclude the relational transcendentals but is their beginning. The beautiful and the good are truly aspects of being. As Balthasar affirms, 'self-showing and self-giving must already be inchoate forms of self-saying even before man shows up on the scene.'⁶⁷

⁶⁰ *MW*, 116.

⁶¹ *E*, 46. Cf., Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 300, where he defends Balthasar's 'unconventional order' of the transcendentals of beauty, goodness and truth. See also *DST*, 396-401.

⁶² Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 300-301, notes that occasionally Balthasar states philosophy, rather than theology, cannot begin with beauty but starts with the barest concepts and, at best, only concludes with beauty. Cf., *GL1*, 17. This philosophical ordering is evidenced by Kant who orders his three Critiques first with truth (pure reason), then goodness (practical reason) and, finally, beauty (aesthetic judgement). The latter is seen in purely regulative terms. Balthasar thus seems to apply a theological order as he confirms at *TD1*, 15-23. Schindler, however, argues there must be a philosophical basis for beginning with beauty given the intrinsic relationship between philosophy and theology that Balthasar affirms. This is echoed in *E*, 45, 78; and, *GL1*, 34.

⁶³ This order is evidenced in how Balthasar structures his trilogy.

⁶⁴ *E*, 77.

⁶⁵ *E*, 83-84.

⁶⁶ *E*, 77.

⁶⁷ *E*, 77.

Saint-Pierre summarises the significance of Balthasar's order thus: beauty is the primary transcendental corresponding to the basic way being appears as radiant *Gestalt*. Goodness is the central transcendental as the hinge within the realm of freedom and action. Truth is the ultimate transcendental where beauty and goodness are brought together in a fruitful manner that ensures a unity that expresses being's ever-greater mystery.⁶⁸ The importance of order reiterates the crucial relationship between the intellect and the will, and the true and the good. Whichever is prioritised impacts how being and spirit interact, and threatens to reduce being either to subject's mind or desire. As I examine later, Balthasar's prioritisation of beauty affirms a joint priority of both intellect and will, and of subject and object, that avoids any such reduction. Beauty is first as the concrete union of the true and the good; and, the heart, as the distinct faculty of beauty, encompasses as a whole the movements of the intellect and will vis-à-vis being.⁶⁹

Regarding Balthasar's prioritisation of beauty, Schindler argues this is based on "fittingness" not 'necessity (as if the order presented here is the only one possible).'⁷⁰ This echoes the circumincession of the transcendentals. In the concrete order, such fittingness means this ordering cannot be insisted upon but allows each person's free response to being. Paradoxically, however, implicit in Schindler's observation is that such fittingness arises from beauty's priority. The possibility of deciding for or against beauty is a function of beauty. This involves its own necessity insofar as it safeguards an openness to being as a gift of divine love.

2.3. *The fruitfulness of being's polar unity*

Balthasar affirms unity as a transcendental property of being. He does not, however, dedicate as much focus to unity as the relational transcendentals. He states, 'we can talk about unity as a transcendental only after having dealt thematically with the other transcendentals first.'⁷¹ This is to avoid abstracting being's unity from the concrete encounter with being's unity-in-difference in actual beings.⁷² This granted, in the *Epilogue*, Balthasar does begin his metaphysical treatment of the transcendentals with unity, calling it the first transcendental. Indeed, unity has always been present as the polarity or unity-in-difference of the analogical nature of created being understood according

⁶⁸ Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité*, 349. Cf., *DST*, 369.

⁶⁹ Schindler argues against Aersten that the heart is the third distinct faculty of the spiritual soul that underpins beauty as a relational transcendental analogous to goodness and truth. *DST*, 400-405.

⁷⁰ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 301.

⁷¹ *TL1*, 7-8.

⁷² Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité*, 230-234, notes how the *Epilogue* takes up the transcendental of unity where it is examined in light of the relational transcendentals' circumincession. Cf., Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2011), 4.

to the real distinction between *esse* and *ens*. In this scheme, each being's unity (*unum*) is tied to its being something (*aliquid*) different from others and vice versa. Being's 'not-one unity' characterises the relational transcendentals.⁷³ Just as the unity 'permeating everything cannot be subsumed under some univocal concept, then the same must necessarily also hold true for the subsequent "transcendentals": the true, the good, and the beautiful – which can only have their place within the act of Being.⁷⁴ The association of being's polar unity with the distinction between *esse* and *ens* means that unity is characterised by the dynamic way *esse* subsists as different beings and their interaction. Unity is thus associated with the polarity between a being's ground, or essence, and its outward expression whereby it communicates itself to other beings. This occurs in each being's shared participation in *esse*'s letting be and is how every being ecstatically receives *esse* whereby it realises its essential being.⁷⁵

As noted in chapter one, Balthasar explicitly identifies this communicative core of being's polar unity with a vital tension that makes being 'the object of an unquenchable interest, indeed, of a reverent, astonished wonderment.'⁷⁶ The vitality coursing through being's unity-in-difference and expressed in the dynamic between ground and appearance is the superabundant spring of finite reality. And because it applies to being itself then this 'immense wealth of vitality' lies also in 'the transcendental difference.'⁷⁷ Balthasar links this to an ontological fruitfulness.⁷⁸ Being's epiphanic nature as manifested in beings according to the relational transcendentals entails a self-openness 'endowed with the miracle of fruitfulness, at least where we are speaking of living beings... [T]he transcendentals (taken as a unity) allow beings to strive beyond themselves: *surrender creates new beings...*'⁷⁹ Each relational transcendentals enacts this fruitfulness in its own order in relationship to the others. This is played out concretely in the subject-object encounter, reflecting how, for Balthasar, 'we encounter all Being both objectively and subjectively...'⁸⁰ Accordingly, I shall now examine each relational transcendental from an objective and subjective perspective while affirming their inseparability.⁸¹

⁷³ *E*, 85.

⁷⁴ *E*, 55.

⁷⁵ *E*, 51.

⁷⁶ *TL1*, 9.

⁷⁷ *E*, 85.

⁷⁸ *E*, 56-57; *E*, 85-86.

⁷⁹ *E*, 109.

⁸⁰ *GL1*, 119.

⁸¹ This reflects Balthasar's account of the positive relational transcendental in the *Epilogue*. As Schindler, *DST*, 364n.51, notes it is important not to separate the subjective and objective aspects. He argues that Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité*, 234-238, risks this. Schindler, by contrast, frames each transcendental as the relationship

3. Beauty

3.1. Beauty's objective perspective

Beauty is, in Balthasar's idiom, being's self-showing. It is the basic event of being's epiphany; the fundamental ontological phenomenon. This underpins how reality is not something we construct but which offers itself to us according to 'the objective evidence that emerges and sheds its light from the phenomenon itself.'⁸² This involves the dual pattern mentioned above where each being appears outwardly and preserves what it is in itself, its essence. More fully, beauty encompasses how this dynamic manifests as a single concrete whole that opens beyond itself to *esse's* superabundance while displaying this excess within each being's determinate reality.⁸³ Balthasar articulates this whole via two aesthetic notions: *Gestalt* and splendour.

For *Gestalt*, Balthasar draws on how classical thought identifies beauty with *forma* or *species*, the 'perfection' of the outward form which contain the depths of a thing's reality.⁸⁴ Splendour, which Balthasar associates with the medieval notions of *lumen* and *splendor*, concerns how any determinate *Gestalt* opens to an inexhaustible depth. He connects this with a Romantic emphasis on 'boundlessness', the 'infinite' and 'the form that transcends itself by pointing beyond to the depths'.⁸⁵ *Gestalt* and splendour, though distinct, are inseparable and only in their unity is being fully disclosed. The light of splendour is not extraneous but 'breaks forth from the form's interior. *Species* and *lumen* in beauty are one...'⁸⁶ This reflects beauty correspondence to how being's polar unity is encountered not abstractly, but concretely as radiant *Gestalt* 'where it is always the totality of being that presents itself... This means a totality of parts and elements, grasped as such, existing and defined as such, which for its existence requires not only a "surrounding world" but ultimately being as a whole...'⁸⁷

Let us consider further Balthasar's notion of *Gestalt*. It encompasses the relationship between the ground of a being – the thing-in-itself, its essence, in its participation of *esse* – and the appearance of this ground in its various manifestations. These two irreducible elements are in asymmetrical reciprocal relationship. First, a being's appearance flows from its essence and participation in *esse*.

between being-in-itself and being-for-another where the dynamic between them opens to a theological perspective. I bring these perspectives together.

⁸² *GL1*, 464.

⁸³ Cf., *GL1*, 234.

⁸⁴ *GL1*, 118-119.

⁸⁵ *GL1*, 118-119.

⁸⁶ *GL1*, 151.

⁸⁷ *GL1*, 28-29.

As Balthasar says, '[b]eauty...is the inexplicable active irradiation of the centre of being into the expressive surface of the image, an irradiation that reflects itself in the image and confers upon it a unity, fullness, and depth surpassing what the image as such contains.'⁸⁸ Secondly, this appearance is no mere extrinsic expression of a fully formed essence, but constitutive of that essence's realisation as it participates in *esse*. A being's appearance is not simply derivative, but 'an original expression. It is a creation, not an imitation.'⁸⁹ A being does not first come into existence and then communicate itself via its appearance. A 'being *comes into existence* only in communicating itself.'⁹⁰ Essence and appearance require each other to be themselves. Yet, for the tension between them to be maintained they must coincide within a whole that encompasses and exceeds them. They must be 'integrated in a permanent tension.'⁹¹ This is the 'illuminated space "between" the ground and its appearing...'⁹² A '*Gestalt* is the whole at once; it *is* the outward expression of the inward ground, taken all at once, as a single, luminous appearance of the whole object.'⁹³ It is a transcendent third that is inseparable from, but more than, the tension between two causal principles, namely, the hidden ground of a being and the outward appearance of this mysterious ground, where this transcendence is thoroughly present to its parts. As Balthasar states, *Gestalt* has 'an exterior which appears and an interior depth, both of which, however, are not separable in the form [*Gestalt*] itself. The content (*Gehalt*) does not lie behind the form (*Gestalt*), but within it.'⁹⁴

Accordingly, each *Gestalt* has a 'triadic structure.'⁹⁵ What is crucial for the present discussion is that this articulates the pattern of fruitfulness of being's epiphany. A *Gestalt* is a concrete fruit that is the effect of the dynamic relationship between its constituent parts. Yet it is also the whole that incorporates its causal principles, undergirding their mutual dependence and distinctiveness. A *Gestalt* is, therefore, an effect that is the cause of its causes. Here the whole has ontological priority over the parts on which it depends. The whole is, moreover, characterised by the dynamic tension between the parts. As Balthasar states, this has 'the precise form of a reciprocal surrender... In this mutual surrender, the essence con-descends to enter into the appearance and to display itself publicly in the world of images, whereas the appearance wants to be nothing other than a function

⁸⁸ *TL1*, 142

⁸⁹ *TL1*, 140.

⁹⁰ *DST*, 185.

⁹¹ *DST*, 168.

⁹² *GL1*, 610-611.

⁹³ *DST*, 184.

⁹⁴ *GL1*, 151.

⁹⁵ *DST*, 241, where Schindler compares the concrete fruitfulness inherent to Balthasar's triadic sense of *Gestalt* to Aristotle's triadic logic which separates the ideal and the real, and Hegel's which reduces the real to the conceptual/ideal.

of the essence's revelation.⁹⁶ The creative event of any being's appearance involves an act of mutual surrender that belongs properly to the realm of beauty. This is, moreover, analogous to love as fully unveiled in the spirit's freedom. As Balthasar states, '[t]o beauty belong not only the "measure, number and weight" of organised material, but also the "energy" of the organising agent, which expresses itself in form without losing itself to the external, and the "glory" proper to being free, and still more deeply, proper to the ability to squander oneself in love.'⁹⁷

This mutual self-giving between ground and appearance is fruitful, moreover, because the whole it constitutes infinitely transcends its parts. As Balthasar explains, vis-à-vis artistic *Gestalt*, 'it is as if, at the moment when the two finite magnitudes of meaning [or essence] and image [or appearance] coincide, the work became infinite – a symbol that from now on transcends the sum of its parts.'⁹⁸ Given this, Schindler comments, 'Balthasar's notion of *Gestalt*...differs in a profoundly significant sense from the Thomistic and Neoplatonic notion of form precisely by the fact that it is *not* simply finite, but is rather the mysterious "intersection" of finitude and infinity.'⁹⁹ In the mutual self-surrender wherein essence and appearance coincide, '[t]he meaning is so completely and perfectly expressed that the surfaces "brim over" with meaning; they become literally radiant with "overfullness"....'¹⁰⁰ Here the fruitful dynamic which inheres a *Gestalt* opens up to infinite splendour. As Balthasar says, '[a] light irradiates the form [*Gestalt*] itself, and the same light points to the reality that is both appearing in that form [*Gestalt*] and simultaneously transcending it.'¹⁰¹ The splendour of this dynamic between appearance and essence, as manifested as a being's *Gestalt*, opens to the splendour of *esse* which achieves subsistence as the being's dynamic reality. *Esse's* splendour is thus inseparable from that of the actual being's *Gestalt*. 'The light which shines forth from the form...is...inseparably the light of the form itself (Scholasticism speaks therefore of *splendor formae*) and light of being as a whole, in which the form is immersed, so that it may have a unitary form.'¹⁰²

Remaining with the dynamic between essence and appearance, Balthasar's notion of *Gestalt* adapts different aspects of the notion of form as conceived in classical, scholastic and certain strands of modern thought.¹⁰³ As Schindler notes, compared to Aquinas' notion of form, *Gestalt* corresponds

⁹⁶ *TL1*, 150

⁹⁷ *GL1*, 441-442.

⁹⁸ *TL1*, 141.

⁹⁹ *DST*, 173.

¹⁰⁰ *DST*, 187-188.

¹⁰¹ *E*, 60

¹⁰² *GL4*, 31.

¹⁰³ See *GL4*, 29-39 where Balthasar notes *Gestalt's* provenance in Platonic *eidōs*, Aristotelian *morphe*, organic form in Herder and Goethe, and the psychology of Christian von Ehrenfels. Goethe is particularly emphasised by Balthasar in contrast to Karl Rahner's Kantianism. See Michael Albus, "Spirit and Fire: An Interview with

‘not to form alone but to the whole composite essence taken concretely in its participation in *esse*. In fact, it might be most appropriate to see *Gestalt* as the Thomistic composite [*ens*], read along the lines of the Platonic *eidos* (as the transcending unity that gives a thing its physical “look”), and even more specifically of the Aristotelian *morphe*, as the living organic whole.’¹⁰⁴ Balthasar thus holds that the transcendent unity of essential form only ever appears within the concrete whole of a being where it is this whole that corresponds to *Gestalt*.

There is, therefore, both a transcendent and immanent notion of essential form operating within *Gestalt*. Each *Gestalt* has, what Balthasar calls, a ‘transcendent centre’ that ‘is the midpoint of the concept of form (*Gestalt*)’ which joins the different ways a being appears into a concrete whole which shines with the light of being.¹⁰⁵ As Balthasar says, ‘individual beings, as required by the act of being, fulfil their respective self-illumination and self-manifestation (as it were, grateful that a primal ground of being “lets them be”) in a “form” whose moments are rightly and revealingly “formed” in an interrelationship with one another that takes place on the basis of a unity: that which converges towards a unity is the light as well as the form....’¹⁰⁶ Michael Waldstein reads Balthasar such that this transcendent unity dominates the various parts. Furthermore, a form exercises a higher quality of unity due to the greater degree of dominance over its parts.¹⁰⁷ As Balthasar says, ‘the “height of the form” is judged according to the greater power of the unity to gather together equal varieties.’¹⁰⁸ This suggests a hierarchy of *Gestalten* based on the degree to which the different ways a being manifests itself are integrated. As Waldstein sees it, the more comprehensive the principle of unity in a *Gestalt*, the greater the complexity of the form, and, therefore, the higher the quality of the *Gestalt* in question. That said, Schindler corrects Waldstein’s overemphasis on the dominance of the

Hans Urs von Balthasar, “*Communio: International Review* 32, (2005): 579. See also *GL5*, 339-408, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, “*Personlichkeit und Form*,” *Gloria Die* 7, (1952): 1-15. Balthasar focuses on Goethe’s sense of the unified wholeness of organic living form and its openness to an infinite whole. He is, however, critical of Goethe remaining within the purely immanent frame. See *GL5*, 363, 409. For the influence of Ehrenfel and Goethe, see Veronica Donnelly, *Saving Beauty: Form as the Key to Balthasar’s Christology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 43-46. For Goethe, cf., Peter Legnowski, ‘Die letzte “säkulare Verwirklichung der Herrlichkeit”’: Zur Goetherezeption Hans Urs von Balthasars’, in *Logik der Liebe und Herrlichkeit Gottes: Hans Urs von Balthasar im Gespräch*, ed. Walter Kasper (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2006), 144; and, Ulrich Simon, “Balthasar on Goethe,” in *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 60-76. Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics*, 53, highlights also the influence of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s sense of ‘in-scape.’ Cf., Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Theology and Aesthetic,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 8, (1981): 63; and, *GL3*, 366-367.

¹⁰⁴ *DST*, 171. Cf., Michael Waldstein, “Expression and Form: Principles of a Philosophical Aesthetics according to Hans Urs von Balthasar,” (PhD diss., University of Dallas, 1981), 65-67. This refers to four different, interlocking senses of *Gestalt*: first, outward shape or outline; second, intelligible form; third, life-form as pertaining to an entire being that exists; and, fourth, historical figure.

¹⁰⁵ *GL4*, 30.

¹⁰⁶ *E*, 66.

¹⁰⁷ Waldstein, “Expression and Form,” 81-2.

¹⁰⁸ *GL4*, 31.

unity of the transcendent centre of the *Gestalt*. It is crucial to affirm also the immanence of this centre to 'its parts and, indeed, its reciprocal *need* for its parts....'¹⁰⁹ As Balthasar confirms, '[t]ranscendence increases along with the immanence.'¹¹⁰ The higher level of quality of a *Gestalt* is not simply about greater unity, but greater immanence of that unity to its diverse material parts. Unity and diversity are not opposed. There is a direct proportion between them. 'The quality of a form...is manifested not only in the fact that none of its parts is left out of that unity, but also in the fact that the parts enjoy a certain freedom in their difference. The rose is a higher *Gestalt* than a heap of sand, not only because it has a greater unity but also because it has more *difference* than the sand heap....'¹¹¹ This creative tension between unity and difference, and transcendence and immanence, within a *Gestalt* unveils further the character of its inherent fruitfulness. The greater transcendent unity of *Gestalt* is manifested as greater immanent difference that in turn manifests a greater transcendent unity within immanent material reality. Indeed, this sense of greater unity-in-difference echoes the perfect difference encompassed by the unity-in-difference of the constitutive human relationships as explored in the previous chapter – a connection I shall return to later in this chapter.

The above concerns the fruitfulness that inheres a *Gestalt* analysed according to its essential and material components. This remains incomplete. The fruitful transcendence of any *Gestalt* only reaches fruition beyond itself via the actuality of *esse*. This betokens a fruitful reversal. Not only is any *Gestalt* the infinitely fruitful whole greater than the sum of its constituent parts, but the internal tension that characterises the *Gestalt* points beyond itself to a greater whole of which it is a part, namely, the splendour of *esse*. Again, '[t]he higher and purer a form, the more will light shine forth from its depths and the more will it point to the mystery of the light of being as a whole.'¹¹² The triadic structure of a *Gestalt* thus opens intrinsically to *esse*. Each being's resplendent *Gestalt* is, therefore, both triadic and quadratic:

it is triadic to the extent that it is a whole, and it is a whole to the extent that it is constituted as such in a fourth dimension, radically different from the other three We might say that this triadic-quadratic logic, the logic of *Gestalt*, is in fact the very logic of fruitfulness: a constant opening up to the genuine novelty of a radically discontinuous order, an openness

¹⁰⁹ *DST*, 171.

¹¹⁰ *GL4*, 31.

¹¹¹ *DST*, 171.

¹¹² *GL4*, 31. Cf., *E*, 59.

that does not imply the destruction of ideal forms but is in fact what first gives them their solidity, their wholeness, and, indeed, their fascination.¹¹³

This encompasses the 'principle of fruitfulness' where 'the "stability" of the "triad" is not closed in on itself, but that it is inwardly, of itself, in principle open to a "fourth," and a "fifth", and so on.'¹¹⁴ This allows beings fruitfully to communicate in a mutually fulfilling way that is creative of new beings. This also enables beings to contribute to yet more comprehensive wholes or *Gestalten* of which they are irreducible parts yet in a way which allows them to be more fully themselves in their distinctiveness. Finally, not only does the fruitful splendour of *esse* shine in and beyond the fruitful splendour of the concrete *Gestalt*, but *esse's* own *Gestalt*-like pattern is unveiled. This concerns the active and receptive letting be which subsists in each being's act of appearing. The luminous pattern of *esse* is intertwined with the particular, concrete form through which it shines. Beauty appears as the radiant *Gestalt* that manifests the event of being's fruitful excess, a letting be that subsists in the more than determinate reality of beings that open to a creative splendour shared with others in their participation in *esse*.¹¹⁵ Again, as I discuss later, this associates the paradigmatic fruitfulness of the constitutive human relationships with the fruitfulness of a radiant *Gestalt* that mediates *esse's* excess fruitfulness.

3.2. Beauty's subjective perspective

Being's beauty concerns not only the appearing object's radiant *Gestalt* but the latter's interaction with the subject, hearkening to *Gestalt's* roots in psychology. Although the object's radiant *Gestalt* has a certain priority, this obtains within a subject-object reciprocity in their joint participation in *esse*. In their complex interaction, subject and object form a single concrete dramatic unity analogous to two people dancing.¹¹⁶ They are a living unity greater than the sum of its parts, where this unity precedes them, yet is dependent on and only manifest in their correlated difference.

In this encounter, the polarity exhibited in a being's resplendent *Gestalt* is echoed within the subject's activity. This is the wonder at being's beauty we examined in chapters one and two. In *GL1*, Balthasar offers a more precise account, identifying this act as encompassing two distinct yet

¹¹³ *DST*, 241-242.

¹¹⁴ *DST*, 121.

¹¹⁵ In the concrete appearance of the *Gestalt* there shines 'the vast ocean of formal fertility which is the mystery of being.' Herbert A. Hodges, review of *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Aesthetik* by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Journal of Theological Studies* 17, (1966): 528.

¹¹⁶ *DST*, 164

inseparable aspects: perception and rapture.¹¹⁷ The resplendent *Gestalt* of the appearing object is simultaneously perceived and appropriated by an act of awe-filled rapture on the subject's part. '[N]o one can really behold who has not already been enraptured, and no one can be enraptured who has not already perceived.'¹¹⁸ Just as a *Gestalt* is a dynamic whole whose depths open to infinite splendour, so the whole subject is transported beyond itself through the rapture of perception of this radiant *Gestalt*. 'We are "enraptured" by our contemplation of these depths and are "transported" to them. But, so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths.'¹¹⁹

To explore this further, by perception Balthasar means not simply how an object is perceived by the senses, although they are crucial to the perception of being.¹²⁰ It encompasses a distinctive intellectual act, one that is, as we will see, inseparable from an act of will understood as rapture. Perception (*Wahrnehmung*) means 'a "taking to oneself" (*nehmen*) of something true (*Wahres*) which is offering itself.'¹²¹ This includes the intellect's participation in *esse's* light which makes seeing *Gestalten* possible, just as this light is seen together with them.¹²² Balthasar explicitly contrasts 'intelligence that perceptively reads the *Gestalt* of things' (*das verstehende, Gestaltenisende Denken*) with 'conceptual thinking' (*das begriffliche Denken*) which follows upon the latter.¹²³ He calls this variously 'perceiving reason', 'apperception', or the passible and agent intellect, all working in conjunction with the imagination.¹²⁴

The imagination here encompasses the active receptivity of sense-based perception of an object's sensible appearance and the receptive activity of the intellect to its essence. These cohere as two dynamic aspects of the single concrete act that opens up to the light of the intellect able to grasp the whole *Gestalt*. As Balthasar says, '[t]he very act of abstraction in which the spontaneous power of the intellect (*intellectus agens*) turns to the sensory material in order to illuminate it with its light and to elevate it into its sphere is simultaneously the act in which the intellect inclines to the

¹¹⁷ *GL1*, 32.

¹¹⁸ *GL1*, 10.

¹¹⁹ *GL1*, 118-119:

¹²⁰ Mark McInroy, *Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses: Perceiving Splendour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 156-157, states 'for the supersensory "splendour" of the form to be perceived.... Balthasar describes the need for a 'spiritualization' of the perceptual faculties of the human being.' Cf., *GL2*, 335 where Balthasar speaks of a 'transcendental sense-perception'.

¹²¹ *GL1*, 120.

¹²² *GL1*, 120: Cf., *GL1*, 164-165.

¹²³ *TL1*, 140.

¹²⁴ *E*, 61-63.

sensible in order to fill, and to find filled, its own empty unity in the latter's multiplicity.¹²⁵ Just as the object's *Gestalt* radiates its own fruitful light that is also the light and fruitfulness of *esse* beyond it, so the images that inhere within the fruitful light of the subject's imagination receives their full ontological measure of fruitfulness in the latter's openness to the light of the intellect's participation in *esse*.¹²⁶ The intellect and imagination's receptively active engagement with the object beyond the subject is mediated by the will's ecstatic movement. This brings us to how perception is inseparable from rapture.

Whereas perception of the radiant *Gestalt* jointly engages the intellect and senses within the imagination's openness to the intellect, rapture concerns the subject's intellectual appetite or will in relation to the same *Gestalt*. Here intellect and will are married together as distinct aspects of a single complex act of the imagination now understood most fully as the concrete act of the heart, the centre of a person, in the sense explored in chapter two. This underlines how any act of perception of a *Gestalt* as a concrete transcendent whole requires an act of the whole subject. Here 'the whole person...enters into a state of vibration and becomes responsive space, the "sounding box" of the event of beauty occurring within him.'¹²⁷

As primarily concerning the will, rapture is an act of freedom understood not principally as choice (*voluntas elicit*) but the fundamental openness of the subject's spiritual nature in its orientation beyond itself to being as a whole (*voluntas ut natura*).¹²⁸ The latter is the rapturous ground of free choice. This places prior receptivity to the beautiful *Gestalt* at the core of the will's freedom. Again, this echoes what we examined in chapter two: the subject can freely move beyond itself towards the object because moved by the object. Between perception and rapture the latter has an absolute priority. The subject's perception of a *Gestalt* is preceded by the rapturous openness of the subject to the appearance of a radiant *Gestalt*. That said, this cannot be separated from the appearance and perception of the object, and, therefore, from the deliberate act of the subject freely to assent to the claim the object makes upon it.

The subject's awe-filled perception of the object's appearance is, therefore, characterised by a twofold distinction between claim and decision. This allots priority to the claim the radiant *Gestalt* makes on the subject's heart yet also calls for and so enables the subject's free decision. However, this depends on the subject's free decision to allow the object to make such a claim. As Schindler

¹²⁵ *TL1*, 151-152.

¹²⁶ *E*, 62-63.

¹²⁷ *GL1*, 220

¹²⁸ *TL1*, 110-112.

states, '[i]nsofar as the subject is free, he cannot be moved against his will, because in that case only a part of him will be moved.'¹²⁹ This identifies the fundamental form of the subject's freedom as 'the rapture, in which the object "claims" the subject for itself. In this respect, the subject's freedom toward the object in its truth is experienced...as the urgent call to decision.'¹³⁰ This urgency of decision applies to all acts of perception, even if it is hidden; yet, it 'increases in proportion as the complexity, or the unity and the difference, of the *Gestalt* increases, and, moreover, it is even in the smaller acts not unrelated to the fundamental decision that the knowing subject will make over the course of his life.'¹³¹ Nor, indeed, is it separable from the primordial decision that is a child's awakening to self-consciousness by another. Every encounter, however great or small, thus offers a potential experience of beauty and, therefore, the breaking in of a gratuitous wonder that beckons to the heart, awakens the subject's attention to the promising depth of things-in-themselves and being's radiance, and energizes the subject to respond to reality out of a receptive freedom.

We can link the centrality of this decision to Balthasar's notion of aesthetic judgement. Balthasar calls this an 'intuitive judgement' of the appearing whole.¹³² As Schindler explains, '[i]n the relation between perception and rapture, ...perception occurs only in an inspired and free movement toward what is apprehended. The act of judgement is the crystallization of this movement.'¹³³ This intuitive judgement means the act whereby the subject assents to being claimed and transported by the object as a transcendent concrete whole is the same act whereby the subject freely grasps the radiant *Gestalt* of the object. 'Judgement, thus understood, is simultaneously an act of appropriation and an act of expropriation.'¹³⁴ It is, moreover, a free act of the whole person (and an act of the whole person because free) that alone is fitting for grasping the whole radiant *Gestalt* of the object. In short, the subject can only take in the transcendent and concrete nature of the *Gestalt* by freely committing their whole self.

This understanding of the subject's wholehearted response to beauty corresponds, in Balthasar's thought, to love. Love is not simply a matter of blind desire or willed active self-giving, but primarily a receptive response of the whole subject to being's beauty.¹³⁵ Love thus matches the subject's rapture-filled perception of beauty as the appearing object's radiant *Gestalt*. As Balthasar says, 'eros is the chosen place of beauty: whatever we love...always appears radiant with glory; and whatever is

¹²⁹ *DST*, 196-197.

¹³⁰ *DST*, 201.

¹³¹ *DST*, 201.

¹³² *E*, 61.

¹³³ *DST*, 194.

¹³⁴ *DST*, 201.

¹³⁵ *GL1*, 121-122.

objectively perceived as glorious...does not penetrate into the onlooker except through the specificity of an eros.¹³⁶ Here, '[L]ove is not "act without image"; on the contrary, love is what creates image and bestows shape absolutely.'¹³⁷

As Schindler examines in a discussion of Aquinas, love as *eros* or *amor* entails 'the recognition that something is good and the positive disposition towards it' where this 'precedes every act of will, just as it precedes every physical desire.'¹³⁸ This matches Balthasar's sense of joint intellectual perception and willing rapture that moves the whole person. Love as recognition is a receptive act of appetite which moves in the '*opposite direction* of all of the other movements of the appetite....' Our will acts 'not exactly like appetite, but more like an intellect, or our intellect...acts, not like intellect, but more like an appetite.'¹³⁹ Hence, love effects an '*inward transformation* of desire brought about by the desirable thing, a transformation that precedes, and indeed makes possible, every single act of desire without exception.'¹⁴⁰ In Balthasar's idiom, the subject receives an object's concrete *Gestalt* which transforms the subject's desire and transports the subject beyond itself. Through this receptivity, the will's desire is fitted to the object's *Gestalt* which thereby furnishes the concrete milieu wherein the will's ecstatic acts occur. Indeed, corresponding to the transporting nature of the beautiful form is 'a pliancy' of the whole person whereby 'one's entire existence' is 'malleable material to be shaped....'¹⁴¹ What Schindler finds in Aquinas applies to Balthasar: 'love is a unity *from* which one acts.... [L]ove is not a transition from potency to act but a sharing of actuality, which precedes all such transitions and gives them order....'¹⁴² For Balthasar, this involves

the metamorphosis of the beholder into the image he beholds, ...the "realisation" of what the image expresses.... The image unfolds *into* the one contemplating it, and it opens out its consequence in his life. It is not I who draw my consequences from what I have seen; if I have really seen it in itself, it is the object of my vision which draws out its implications in me.... The form which inscribes itself in the living centre of my being becomes...my judgement....¹⁴³

¹³⁶ LAC, 52-54.

¹³⁷ GL1, 424.

¹³⁸ Schindler, "Love and Beauty," 340.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 343.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 342.

¹⁴¹ GL1, 221.

¹⁴² Schindler, "Love and Beauty," 347.

¹⁴³ GL1, 485.

The subject thereby judges after the fashion of the beauty of the radiant *Gestalt* it encounters which in-forms and trans-forms the subject.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, subject and object are transformed within a larger shared reality. As Balthasar says, 'there should be a correspondence between object and subject; the external harmony must correspond to a subjective need and both give rise to a new harmony of higher order; subjectivity, with its feeling and imagination, must free itself in an objective work, in which it rediscovers itself, in the course of which...there may be as much self-discovering as experience of another.'¹⁴⁵ This reiterates how, in the beautiful, object and subject are active and receptive to each other. They communicate via their shared participation in *esse*.¹⁴⁶

4. The Good

Balthasar's understanding of goodness follows from his account of the beautiful. Thus, from an objective perspective, goodness denotes how being's manifestation as beautiful, as a being's radiant *Gestalt*, also involves a self-giving. As Balthasar says, '[w]hat is shown (beauty) imparts itself (goodness)...'¹⁴⁷ Whereas beauty concerns being's appearance in the concrete, goodness foregrounds the gift aspect of this same appearance.

This embeddedness in being's beauty means that goodness exhibits the same polarity evidenced in the radiant *Gestalt*. This polarity translates into how each being is both a determinate good-for-others and a good-in-itself. Hence, being gives itself in the self-giving of particular beings as a determinate object to be used and enjoyed by other beings for their good and fulfilment. Thus, any being's self-giving goodness intrinsically references other beings. The object's self-giving incorporates thereby a receptivity whereby it is appropriated by other beings. This allows these others to strive beyond themselves towards what is given for their fulfilment. Being's self-giving 'is why striving for something is universal.'¹⁴⁸

That said, being's self-giving is not simply to be reduced to a determinate good for the sake of other beings' fulfilment. A being does not give itself, and so is not good, simply because it fulfils other beings' desire or enjoyment. A being gives itself as a manifestation of its goodness-in-itself which exceeds any particular usefulness. Its goodness transcends how it appears as a determinate good that matches a particular desire. Being's inherent goodness is, however, immanent to and dependent on how a being is a particular good-for-others. This emphasises how the good is

¹⁴⁴ As Francesca A. Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty, A Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 13, notes 'the self is unified when it is guided by aesthetic form.'

¹⁴⁵ *ExT1*, 105.

¹⁴⁶ *E*, 63.

¹⁴⁷ *E*, 69.

¹⁴⁸ *E*, 69.

embedded in beauty's radiant *Gestalt* pattern. As Balthasar emphasises, this recognition of and striving after the good-in-itself, that does not reduce to the desire of the one striving, only comes completely into view with the self-conscious subject.¹⁴⁹

Viewed from the perspective of the subject-object encounter, goodness entails a reciprocity of self-giving activity and receptivity on part of object and subject. Thus, the self-giving of any particular being via its concrete appearance as *Gestalt* also requires that it be receptive to the subject's active and ecstatic striving towards it as a determine good. As Balthasar says, this indicates a dependence of the object's good, that is, its capacity to give itself and be receptive to the subject's striving, on the subject giving itself in a way that is receptive to the object's self-gift.¹⁵⁰

This underscores the central position Balthasar allots to the subject's freedom of will in receiving the object's self-giving. Although a being may give itself as good, it cannot impose itself on the subject's freedom without threatening the subject's good. Indeed, the subject can resist the good for this reason.¹⁵¹ As Schindler summarises Balthasar, 'the object must in some sense await the free reception by the subject, and in that respect in its freedom in giving it has a certain dependence on the freedom that receives. The good can therefore be good, not through force but through persuasion and vulnerability to rejection.'¹⁵² This is clearest in the encounter between subjects where it entails a renunciation of efforts to coerce another subject's freedom but requires a shared openness to being's transcendent ground wherein each thing participates, including another's freedom.¹⁵³ This involves an active sense of welcome and vulnerability to the other's freedom that requires 'neither compulsion nor allurements from the outside; rather, it is the exposure of the heart's innermost freedom....'¹⁵⁴ This becomes especially apparent with the paradoxical nature of love. Love is both the fulfilment of humanity's free spiritual nature, and so a determinate good accruing to that nature, yet as love, cannot be something forced but only given in 'free self-surrender' as a good-in-itself.¹⁵⁵ It is this freedom that underpins the dramatic nature of the self-giving of goodness. The 'human person will always be trying to compel something that essentially

¹⁴⁹ *E*, 69.

¹⁵⁰ *E*, 69.

¹⁵¹ *E*, 72.

¹⁵² *DST*, 366.

¹⁵³ *E*, 73.

¹⁵⁴ *E*, 74.

¹⁵⁵ *E*, 69-70.

cannot be compelled: love. Furthermore, each person can be denied what he demands from the other...and his demands can be refused for reasons that are or are not good.¹⁵⁶

As with the polarity exhibited in the object's good as a determinate good relative to others and a good-in-itself, the subject's response exhibits its own polarity. This involves two moments in the subject's enactment of the good: a receptive act of will which is one of appropriative choice and an ecstatic act of will enacted as abiding fidelity.¹⁵⁷ Choice here flows from the response the subject has already made to the beautiful whereby the subject is claimed by the object's radiant *Gestalt* and transported beyond itself. This movement enables and invites the subject to respond fully with its deliberately willed act of free choice. As Schindler state, 'this choice has the basic structure of a yes, of an assent to the good that has...presented itself *in* the beautiful.'¹⁵⁸ In this receptive act of appropriation, the subject also goes out to the object. Yet, echoing the polarity exhibited in the beautiful, the good that gives itself exceeds any such appropriation by the subject. As with the radiance of the *Gestalt*, the excessive character of the good-in-itself wells up within the determinate good that is given and appropriated. In correspondence with this excess, the first moment of choice needs to be deepened in a second moment of fidelity on the part of the subject. Schindler defines this fidelity as 'an abiding with what was chosen wherever it may lead, and perhaps significantly beyond what one initially expected.'¹⁵⁹ The self-giving that lies at the core of any determinate good exceeds our initial appropriation of it and instead expropriates us and, if we remain committed to this expropriation, transforms us. Such transformation follows from the subject's fidelity to the object in its abiding difference.

5. Truth

Truth represents how being's self-showing (beauty) and self-giving (goodness) are inseparable from and culminate in being's self-expression. In line with his hierarchical and evolutionary account of the transcendentals, Balthasar associates truth-as-self-expression particularly with self-conscious freedom. As noted above, however, even beings lacking self-consciousness express themselves in an analogous fashion.

To expand, from an objective perspective, being expresses itself according to the self-expression of each being in the polarity between being grounded-in-itself and going out of itself to realise its innermost reality. In the realm of truth, this involves a tension between a being's determinate

¹⁵⁶ *E*, 70.

¹⁵⁷ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 314-315.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 315.

outward expression of its unified essential and existential being-in-itself, and its abiding mystery and transcendent depth that opens to being's excess. For Balthasar, truth is characterised by an abiding mystery where the object is more-than-what-is-determinately-disclosed yet where this mystery is expressed in a determinate or, better, super-determinate fashion as a radiant *Gestalt*.¹⁶⁰ This associates being's mystery, not with negative inaccessibility, but an inexhaustible, ever-greater luminosity shining in each being's super-determinate reality. Such mystery is not opposed to determinate clarity rather it shines within the object's more-than-determinate *Gestalt*. Such ontological mystery 'results from the expressiveness of reality rather than from being's relentless withdrawal.'¹⁶¹

The unveiling of a being's ever-greater luminous mystery in its super-determinate self-expression, however, is not achieved alone. It requires coming to realisation beyond itself in others, most fully in self-conscious spirit. Beings express their truth through communication. As Balthasar says, '[e]very being has the gift of being able to "express" itself to another, which capacity presupposes an "innerness", an ability to communicate, that is, to impart itself. This "im-parting" implies a mysterious "partition" "in" another, in which the one imparting himself both gives himself away and at the same time...preserves himself.'¹⁶² A being's dependence on others to unveil its truth and express itself deepens, therefore, what is first shown, perceived and wondered at as radiant *Gestalt* in beauty; and what is imparted, received, sought and enjoyed as a determinate good that opens to the being's inexhaustible goodness-in-itself. As Balthasar says:

[t]he entity in its essence [*Wesen*] is represented in its appearance. This re-presentation gives it its form [*Gestalt*] in the world. In this form [*Gestalt*] it pre-sents its sense-ful, logos-based content as something entirely intuitable. It thus also gives itself from within the context of the whole world so that it can be used (*uti*) as gift but also enjoyed (*frui*) and in which, finally, even its truth is proven.¹⁶³

Truth thus involves a disclosure wherein what is shown as beautiful and bestowed as good is indeed unveiled as the reality of the being-in-itself and its abiding mystery in its openness to *esse*.

Let us consider this vis-à-vis the subject-object encounter. To reiterate, a being's self-expression in truth is not achieved unilaterally. It is an event of reciprocal encounter, the more so the higher the level of beings involved. This means that a being's truth depends on being offered space to express

¹⁶⁰ *TL1*, 223.

¹⁶¹ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 311.

¹⁶² *E*, 51.

¹⁶³ *E*, 83.

itself, ultimately in the freedom of self-consciousness wherein the object achieves greater realisation. This cannot mean, however, the assimilation of a being's conceptual reality to the subject's mind. Rather, a being's self-expression attains completion when the subject recognises the object's appearance as 'the self-perfecting of what is self-expressive and not as something belonging to it....' The object's manifold appearances are taken as a single unified *Gestalt* to refer 'immediately...to the other self-expressing being – the "thing in itself".' The subject 'takes the other as something other, ...and understands the other's acts of expression as those of the other's interiority or subsistence.'¹⁶⁴ The subject's recognition of the object's self-expressing reality requires that the subject goes out to the object. The event of truth thus begins ecstatically outside the subject. This stresses how truth is rooted in the good whereby the subject not only goes out to appropriate the object's good for itself but remains outside itself in fidelity to the object's goodness-in-itself. In the order of truth, this fidelity becomes self-giving trust.¹⁶⁵ Through the subject's ecstatic trust in the object's irreducible otherness, the object discloses its reality to the subject's receptivity.¹⁶⁶

This dynamic of trust in the object and disclosure to the subject pivots on the subject's act of judgement coming to fruition in truth. This is the culmination of the subject's act of intuitive judgement enacted first in beauty where the object's *Gestalt* is grasped by the subject being transported beyond itself. As noted above, this involves a receptive movement of the will which is freely appropriated through the subject's assent and fidelity in the good. In the realm of truth, the subject completes this scheme by judging the object's appearance to be an expression of the object itself.¹⁶⁷ The subject can do this because its own self-conscious freedom is constituted by and open to being as whole. As Balthasar expands, '[t]he subject "discovers" Being only when the subject is discovered by Being. The *cogito ergo sum* in which the subject discovers the entire openness of the real in reflexive and free self-possession happens only when the subject is addressed by a reality that

¹⁶⁴ *E*, 52-53.

¹⁶⁵ *E*, 53. As Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 315, clarifies, fidelity 'becomes *trust*, and in this moment the order of the good passes to the order of the true.'

¹⁶⁶ This echoes Balthasar's understanding of truth as both a Greek sense of *aletheia* (unveiling) and a Hebraic sense of *emeth* (faithfulness). *TL1*, 38-39.

¹⁶⁷ This reflects Aristotle and Aquinas' sense that judgement is the intellectual act which composes and divides. See *Metaphysics*, VI.4.1027b and *De Veritate* 1.3. Aquinas adds to Aristotle that *esse* too is attained by judgement. See *De Veritate* 2.6. On this see, Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 209. For a contrary interpretation of Aquinas, cf., Aertsen, *The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, 170-185. For further discussion, see John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984) 69-104. Balthasar affirms an analytic and synthetic component to judgement whereby the whole essential and existential reality of a being is attained. See *TL1*, 248.

manifests itself through phenomenal images.¹⁶⁸ Balthasar thus understands the subject's act of judgment as contributing to truth insofar as it 'concedes' to the appearing phenomenon the reality of the being-in-itself. This concession occurs within the subject and object's joint participation in *esse*. Echoing the metaphysics explored in chapter one, the subject lets the other be 'in the unity appropriate to that other in the mystery of that other's "being-there".... The other...is thus revealed to me as a mystery lying well beyond all grasping concepts precisely when it reveals itself to me without any desire to hold back....'¹⁶⁹ This 'ensues only if, while being addressed by this real thing, I gain the intuition in myself...of "reality", in whose light true judgement occurs....'¹⁷⁰ Because the light of being is reflected in spirit as a gift bestowed from beyond itself whereby the spirit recognizes its own existence, the spirit can freely contribute to the expression of other beings who participate in the light of being. The subject's act of judgement does not constitute truth; rather, the subject's judgement is judged against the ever-greater divine gift of being bestowed to subject and object. This reiterates that truth is not simply a function of the object being taken into the subject's intellect. The object discloses its truth because the subject has willingly gone out of itself in its openness to *esse* which it shares with the object. This echoes how, for Balthasar, it is not simply the will that is ecstatic, but so too in the intellect – it must go beyond itself to understand. The subject arrives at this point of truthful disclosure together with the object via their mutual encounter in the beautiful and good.

This recasts the evolutionary relationship of the transcendentals as, what Schindler calls, 'the narrative structure of the soul's encounter with reality.'¹⁷¹ The transcendentals chart a dramatic course where truth is the final outcome: 'the *truth* of being reveals itself "explicitly" only through the mediation of the ex-propiative moment of goodness, and this moment, in turn, does not make its demands except within the "rapture" in which the soul already receives a "foretaste," we might say, of being's good truth.'¹⁷² This begins with being's epiphany in beauty where the subject responds with 'vision and rapture'; then, in goodness with 'choice and fidelity'; and culminates in truth, with 'trust and disclosure.' These moments are successive yet overlapping.¹⁷³ They do not, moreover, terminate with a being's disclosure to the subject's understanding. Disclosure 'reveals truth to be diaphanous, to be the communication of a reality that retains its integrity as an objective *Gestalt*

¹⁶⁸ *E*, 82.

¹⁶⁹ *E*, 52-53.

¹⁷⁰ *E*, 82-83.

¹⁷¹ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth", 316.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 317.

abidingly distinct from the soul and so abidingly mysterious....¹⁷⁴ Truth's disclosure is, therefore, a moment of epiphany in a new radiant *Gestalt* wherein being's ever-greater transcendence shines out.¹⁷⁵

Such transcendence is, therefore, no formless excess into which subject and object are subsumed. It concerns the new *Gestalten* that are the concrete fruit of the subject-object encounter.¹⁷⁶ These *Gestalten* encompass this union in a way that transcends subject and object yet affirms their diversity and communicates being afresh.¹⁷⁷ This is why Balthasar associates truth with fruitfulness.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, these new *Gestalten* are the fruition of beauty's incipient fruitfulness. They incorporate in a transformative union the radiant *Gestalt* of the object's first appearance and the subject's wholehearted self-giving free response to the latter where this exceeds their individual contributions in their shared participation in *esse*. Thus, the *Gestalten* of truth are partly the fruit of the subject's own perceptive, intellectual and willed activity. This undergirds how the intelligibility of an object's *Gestalt* exceeds the being itself. And yet, the truth of the *Gestalten* resides also beyond the subject insofar as the *Gestalten* possess an independent concrete existence distinct from the subject. 'To say that the *Gestalt* is thus irreducibly distinct from the soul means that the soul can "appropriate" it only by going beyond itself....'¹⁷⁹ That said, the *Gestalt* also remains distinct from the being that is known since the *Gestalt* is the only ever the concrete appearance of an ever-greater reality beyond what appears. It 'is an intelligibility that the soul can comprehend, and thus include within itself, but which represents more than the soul can articulate....and at the same time, while it lies beyond the mere material existence of thing, it remains a relative partial expression of that reality: the reality could have appeared differently, and it does not simply exhaust all that it is in the particular appearance.'¹⁸⁰

This notion of truth-as-fruit manifested in new radiant *Gestalten* is, for Balthasar, paradigmatically expressed in language. Language is 'no mere *ens rationis* and *ens diminutum* but rather ontological reality.'¹⁸¹ Accordingly, Balthasar stresses language's role in enabling being's self-expression in the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 317.

¹⁷⁵ Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 17, contrast this with Descartes' 'clear and distinct ideas' which concern a comprehensive either-or disclosure.

¹⁷⁶ Cf., *E*, 53.

¹⁷⁷ *GL4*, 28–29, *TL1*, 202–203.

¹⁷⁸ *TL1*, 39: 'Once truth has become present, a thousand consequences, a thousand insights, spring from it as from a seed.'

¹⁷⁹ Schindler, "Non-Possessive Concept of Truth," 593-594. Cf., *TL1*, 61-78.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 594

¹⁸¹ *E*, 79.

self-expressing activity of beings.¹⁸² Here beings both depend on being illuminated in human free expression to express themselves fully, yet also enable such free expression in humans who thereby recognise their own capacity as creators of meaning that expresses being's reality in the communal medium of language.

This ontological significance of language to truth is, for Balthasar, inseparable from beauty and goodness. Each being's epiphany in beauty and self-giving in goodness are 'indispensable moments in their emergence into speech.'¹⁸³ Indeed, human language 'has always implied the (subhuman) organic structure of self-showing and self-giving, drawing this structure into the sphere of the spiritual.'¹⁸⁴ That said, self-expression in language 'is more than simply externalizing oneself in manifestation or action: it presupposes the strongest tension between perfect interiority in the freedom of self-consciousness and perfect externalizing in a more than natural mimesis and gesture...'¹⁸⁵ Hence, language is a function of the human capacity freely to express the self-expressing excess of *esse* as it subsists in beings yet also transcends them. As Balthasar states, language is only possible when 'Being in its entirety...is fundamentally open to spiritual self-consciousness...which grasps itself reflexively as Being...which is always more than the sum of the finite beings that partake in it.'¹⁸⁶ The self-conscious spirit, moreover, only attains to this insight into being as whole and, therefore, the freedom to express itself and to judge the reality of other beings' self-expression, because it is addressed by the light of being in other beings. As we saw in chapter two, this occurs primordially for each child through the address of the light of its parents' love which mediates the light of the gift of divine being.

Language is here indispensable to the act of judgement whereby the self-conscious spirit enables other beings to express themselves and expresses its own self-conscious freedom through the light received from them. This occurs when 'the mind...conscious of its own "to be", can grasp these existing things in the light of Being by means of images and can address those images because they are illumined by this light.'¹⁸⁷ This requires that human subjects 're-pond [*ant-worten*] with a word [*Wort*] that is spirit [*the verbum intellectus or cordis*], but with a word that has always had its sensible correspondence, even if the vision of insight into reality as such precedes this answer...'¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² Cf., Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics*, 96.

¹⁸³ *E*, 78.

¹⁸⁴ *E*, 80.

¹⁸⁵ *E*, 77.

¹⁸⁶ *E*, 78.

¹⁸⁷ *E*, 78. Humans, as embodied sensed-based spiritual beings, only mature to spiritual self-consciousness by being addressed thus.

¹⁸⁸ *E*, 79.

Balthasar here follows Aquinas in affirming 'the medium of our human thinking and judging is therefore speech....'¹⁸⁹ Truth's disclosure via the union of subject and object in the concrete fruit of new *Gestalten* thus finds its correspondence in the meanings of human language. This is greater than any one individual yet funds each person's freedom: 'self-expression is a free imaging, in which the spiritual subject can make known its reflexivity, relying both on language's prior social conventions as well as on the personal inventions of new sentences.'¹⁹⁰

Language is, therefore, 'the sphere in which human beings understand one another and themselves...which is why knowledge always presupposes community...'¹⁹¹ This presupposition of community and interdependence enables self-expression and freedom. Furthermore, language and any meaning-imbued activity are the means whereby humans know each other in love.¹⁹² Here '[s]ouls can truly encounter one another and changes places through the narrow passageway of image-bound words.'¹⁹³ The fruitful exchanges of language are the medium for the love rooted in beauty, given freely in goodness and expressed in truth which shines anew with being's radiant beauty.¹⁹⁴ Hence, human language encompasses being's self-expressing reality which always exceeds simply what humans express. This emphasises how 'truth and language are not the same even as language conditions and makes possible the expression of truth. The expression is always outstripped by that which it expresses, and this is because what is expressed drives us to ask more deeply about what we have received.'¹⁹⁵ As I examine later, Balthasar's understanding of the metaphysical significance of language vis-à-vis truth, and its dependence on beauty and goodness, and importance to love, finds its measure in the fruitfulness of the constitutive human relationships.

6. Beauty's Primacy

Having considered beauty, goodness, and truth as distinct yet interdependent aspects of being's epiphanic character in the subject-object encounter, I now consider more fully their circumincessive relationship. I examine this principally from the perspective of the primacy Balthasar allots to beauty. Beauty's primacy rests on how it is the concrete unity of the true and good. It is a third positive relational transcendental yet it is not any of the following: situated alongside them; their nominal aggregate; a transcendent unity that negates them; nor, are the good and true derived from

¹⁸⁹ *E*, 79.

¹⁹⁰ *E*, 77.

¹⁹¹ *E*, 79.

¹⁹² This reflects the biblical understanding of knowledge which 'comprises the full range of man's concrete cognitive possibilities, including sexual experience....' *TL2*, 28–29.

¹⁹³ *E*, 80.

¹⁹⁴ *E*, 80–81.

¹⁹⁵ Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics*, 130. Cf., *TL1*, 227.

beauty. Rather, beauty incorporates the opposing movements of the intellect's receptivity to being in truth and the will's ecstatic relationship to being in the good. Beauty encompasses them in its own order that has a relative completeness-in-itself. It transcends the good and the true as their concrete unity yet is immanently dependent on and permeates them. Regarding goodness and truth, therefore, beauty has the structure of a radiant *Gestalt*. This means beauty can be analysed according to how it relies on and transforms its component parts.

[T]here is a "truth-like" movement of the object's being taken spiritually into the subject...though this is not truth *per se*; it is truth trans-formed by goodness, which means the grasp is not an explicit comprehension.... At the same time, there is a rapture, a movement of the subject *toward* the object that imitates the good, but is not the good *per se*; it is goodness trans-formed by truth so as to be, not a real possession or enjoyment, but specifically a disinterested pleasure..... [B]eauty is not merely conceptual and not merely enjoyable because it is both simultaneously.¹⁹⁶

In beauty, the intellect and will are set into action in unison by being's epiphany, not in their own right, but, to recall the discussion of chapter two, in the heart's active receptivity to the object's receptive activity. The intellect and will do not reach completion in beauty but await fulfilment in their own orders. That said, not only does the mutual inherence and transformation of the good and true characterise beauty, but, given their shared genesis in beauty, beauty mediates the true and good to each other making them what they are in themselves. Thus, to reiterate, the receptivity of the intellect to being in truth incorporates the ecstasy of the subject's will towards the object – truth's relationship to goodness – to be truth at all. This is the spontaneous activity of the agent intellect. Likewise, the ecstatic activity of the will towards being in the good incorporates the receptivity of subject's intellect to the object – goodness' relationship to truth – to be the good. This is the *voluntas ut natura*.

The good and truth remain true to their interdependence insofar as they remain rooted in beauty. Accordingly, beauty is 'more foundational than goodness and truth, since it establishes the context within which all of our acts of understanding and desire take place.... *Every action is ultimately a response at some level to beauty.*¹⁹⁷ That said, truth and goodness do not simply depend on beauty, beauty depends on them. As Balthasar says, '[t]he form as it appears to us is beautiful only because the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that, in it, the truth and goodness of the

¹⁹⁶ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth", 314.

¹⁹⁷ Schindler, "Love and Beauty," 349.

depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating.¹⁹⁸

This brings us to consider how beauty's primacy safeguards the ontological fruitfulness of the transcendentals as properties of being's own transcendent superabundant actuality. Where either truth or goodness are prioritised over the other, being risks losing its transcendence by being reduced to the subject. This is clearest when truth is prioritised since being becomes a function of the mind's receptive grasp of the object with no relation to object's goodness-in-itself.¹⁹⁹ This precludes any fruitfulness beyond the mind's abstractions and ideas. Moreover, goodness, because made secondary to truth, risks becoming a function of and mere agent of an abstract rationalism that undermines any genuine sense of freedom based on the fruitful encounter with others.

By comparison, a loss of fruitful transcendence is less obvious if the good is prioritised since this concerns the subject's movement beyond itself towards the object through a free act of will. Indeed, Balthasar affirms how transcendence is associated particularly with the good. He disagrees, however, with, for instance, Jean-Luc Marion, that this makes the good more transcendent than being and truth, or, indeed, beauty.²⁰⁰ Such an approach threatens the concrete reality of beings since it precludes from the good any receptivity to the object's being-in-itself. This makes the good an arbitrary function of the subject's will which acts against a purely negative backdrop. The will is here blindly irrational. Moreover, transcendence and fruitfulness are subject to the 'the sovereign act of the sheer origin' of the subject's 'self-positing.'²⁰¹ This undermines a transcendent source of being's fruitfulness beyond the subject. Furthermore, truth, as secondary to the good, risks becoming a function of the will's arbitrary choice.²⁰² Additionally, as Schindler notes, even where an initial grasp of the object is granted, a fruitful encounter with being's transcendence is undermined insofar as the good is made more ultimate than truth. Receptivity to the object becomes merely instrumental for the subject's self-positing journey in a futile attempt to go beyond itself. The object becomes the expendable means to 'the infinity of striving or the infinity of kenotic self-gift.'²⁰³ This

¹⁹⁸ *GL1*, 118-119.

¹⁹⁹ Cf., the critique against truth put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 300.

²⁰⁰ *TL2*, 177n.9.

²⁰¹ *TL1*, 22.

²⁰² Balthasar is concerned with 'power masquerading as surrender.' Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics*, 36. Here human creativity attempts to supplant divine *creatio ex nihilo*. Cf., Nichols, *Scattering the Seed*, 215: 'Spontaneity and receptivity may not so much coalesce as prove mutually subversive, reciprocally destructive.'

²⁰³ *DST*, 399.

jeopardizes transcendence and being's fruitfulness because final emphasis is placed on the subject – 'if the last word is the gift of self, the final accent falls on the *self*.'²⁰⁴

By contrast, Balthasar's ordering of the transcendentals safeguards the transcendent source of being's fruitfulness. This is because, first, the beautiful is an event of mutual transcending enacted jointly by object and subject. The subject's will and intellect are actively engaged at the outset from beyond the subject by an object whose ground remains irreducibly different to the subject. This prevents the intellect or the will collapsing into each other. Secondly, Balthasar's ordering means that the transcendence associated with the good is not inimical to truth's disclosure of an object's essence as a clear determinate concept because goodness has its own provenance in a truth-like receptivity to the object's radiant *Gestalt* in beauty. Thirdly, the transcendent source of the fruitfulness of the transcendentals is safeguarded not only through the primacy of beauty but the ultimacy of truth. Since truth is reached via the beautiful and the good, it does not correspond to a mere abstract grasp of the object. Truth is the communion of subject and object in their mutual ecstatic encounter beyond each other in the fruit of their union which is an objective new *Gestalt*.²⁰⁵ This emphasises how 'the *transcendence* of the transcendental relation – its being in every moment an event that is "more than self" – requires that the gift of self in the end be subordinated to the objective fruit of that gift.'²⁰⁶ Here truth is a fruitful new event of beauty. As Balthasar says: 'the name of this radiant property of truth, which overwhelms by its splendor, its indivisible integrity, and its perfect expressive power, is, in fact, none other than beauty. Beauty is the aspect of truth that cannot be fitted into any definition but can be apprehended only in direct intercourse with it; thanks to beauty, every encounter with truth is a new event.'²⁰⁷

We can enumerate several implications of this understanding of beauty. First, as noted above, beauty displays a *Gestalt*-like structure vis-à-vis goodness and truth. This means that beauty is a third characterised not only by the horizontal polarity between its constituent terms, but also a transcendent vertical polarity that opens within this horizontal tension. This transcendent-immanent dynamic reflects how the primacy of beauty aligns not only with how beauty is the concrete unity of the good and the true, but how this concrete unity of two-in-a-third is the manifestation of being's transcendent unity. As Schindler clarifies, '[i]f beauty is the unity of truth and goodness *within* the order of the true and good, unity itself is the transcendental that comprehends the whole.' Thus,

²⁰⁴ *DST*, 399-400.

²⁰⁵ Cf., Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité*, 349. Truth saves beauty from becoming superficial aestheticism and the self-giving of the good from becoming absolute self-emptying.

²⁰⁶ *DST*, 400.

²⁰⁷ *TL1*, 141-142.

beauty parallels how the immanent transcendent unity of a *Gestalt* points beyond itself to the wholly other order of the unity of *esse*. This pattern is echoed in the relational transcendentals. As Schindler continues, '[t]he organic whole that corresponds to the circumincession of the beautiful, the good, and the true, and the irreducible tension that results from it 'is "crystallized" in the surpassing of that whole into a "radically other" order.²⁰⁸ This also explains why beauty has 'a general primacy' over the good and true, while underscoring the primacy of the good and true in their own orders. While beauty is the concrete appearance of the comprehensive unity of the whole, it 'is not so to speak responsible for the unity of the whole *alone*, but is itself a manifestation of a unity that transcends the whole, [hence] its general primacy...is not something that it has to *insist* on at every turn in relation to the others, but rather, the transcendence of unity itself "frees" it to be subordinate to the other orders in a way that enriches both the true and the good....²⁰⁹ It is only via goodness and truth, and their relationship in beauty, that being's transcendent unity is fully expressed.

Here the wholly other order of unity, as articulated in polarity between *esse* and *ens*, 'undergirds' beauty, goodness and truth and so '*precedes*' them; and yet is what 'their complex circumincession in fact explicates (and thus comes *after* them)....'²¹⁰ This reflects how, in Balthasar's concrete approach to metaphysics, being's polar unity is only encountered through the concrete dynamic of the relational transcendentals as 'the self-surpassing of the three transcendentals *into* the wholly other order....'²¹¹ As Balthasar says, 'in the cleavage that traverses their worldly form, the transcendentals necessarily pervade one another, yet, in virtue of this same cleavage, hence, of their "finitude", they point together beyond themselves. In other words, as the nature unfolds of "*ens [sic] completum et simplex sed non subsistens*," they all together contain a super-finite, super-essential aspect by which they point to their origin, their conservation, and their end in God.'²¹² In this concrete way, according to the order of the relational transcendentals that Balthasar proposes, the not-one unity of the analogical nature of created being opens to the ever-greater reality of divine being.²¹³

Secondly, that beauty concretely manifests the ever-greater excess of being's transcendent unity reflects Balthasar's association of beauty with groundlessness.²¹⁴ Beauty is not simply concerned

²⁰⁸ *DST*, 400-401.

²⁰⁹ *DST*, 402.

²¹⁰ *DST*, 402.

²¹¹ *DST*, 402.

²¹² *TL2*, 184.

²¹³ Cf., *Ext1*, 111

²¹⁴ *TL1*, 224.

with the dynamic of the outward appearance of a being's inward ground as a concrete whole, but with the ground of this dynamic. Beauty is the manifestation of the 'ground of the ground' or 'groundless ground.'²¹⁵ As Balthasar says, '[a] moment of grace lies in all beauty, it shows itself to me far beyond that I have a right to expect, which is why we feel astonishment and admiration.'²¹⁶ Beauty's groundlessness concerns the 'being-in-itself' quality of being as divine gift.²¹⁷ If the beautiful makes any demands it is 'to be allowed to be what it is beyond our attempts to control and manipulate it, in order truly to be able to be happy by enjoying it....'²¹⁸ Any reductive account based on the '*necessity of being* must always be transcended by the eternal wonder of *being allowed to be*.²¹⁹ Beauty is the "'just-is-ness" of things. When we look up at a starry sky...we are not instructed or fed, ...we are simply moved in a deep way...'²²⁰ Indeed, Balthasar associates this gratuitous aspect of beauty with a freedom that has its own quality of necessity: 'it possesses its intelligibility precisely *as* a miracle; it is something that binds and frees at the same time, since it gives itself unambiguously as the "self-manifesting freedom" (Schiller) of inner, undemonstrable necessity....'²²¹ This necessarily groundless quality of beauty reflects paradoxically how it is more foundational than the good and true as their groundless ground.

Thirdly, insofar as goodness and truth remain rooted in beauty they manifest within their own orders beauty's groundlessness. This transforms their character into a communication of something endlessly fascinating which cannot be exhausted by what the subject makes of them. Balthasar enumerates this from both a negative and positive perspective. Negatively, without beauty truth 'remains both pragmatic and formalistic;' and, 'the good remains both utilitarian and hedonistic....'²²² Positively, the 'depth-dimension' between a being's ground and its manifestation as disclosed in a radiant *Gestalt* '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.'²²³ Beauty's

²¹⁵ *GL1*, 610; *TL1*, 223.

²¹⁶ *E*, 66. Cf., *GL*, 611.

²¹⁷ Within the immanent frame, such groundlessness has a tragic sense: 'the "sorrow of the gods" (*Göttertrauer*) wafts about the beautiful form, for it must die, and the state of being blissfully enraptured always includes a knowledge of its tragic contradiction....' *GL1*, 237. This is redeemed by divine beauty even if 'there remains a certain trembling on the part of a [finite] freedom that surrenders itself....' Ultimately, there is 'a quieting of the heart' as God is greater than our hearts. *GL1*, 238-239.

²¹⁸ *GL1*, 153.

²¹⁹ *GL1*, 610-611.

²²⁰ Schindler, "Love and Beauty," 350-351.

²²¹ *LAC*, 52-54.

²²² *GL1*, 152-153.

²²³ *GL1*, 152-153.

groundlessness thus transforms thought and action.²²⁴ It introduces ‘contemplative wonder more fundamentally at the origin of all our knowing – an origin that constantly abides as a life-giving principle – and...a disposition of gratitude more fundamentally at the origin of our action.’²²⁵

Fourthly, beauty’s groundlessness, and so that of goodness and truth, embodies a particular notion of reciprocal causality. Each of the relational transcendentals betokens a single act shared jointly between two agents in the concrete event of encounter between subject and object. As Schindler explains:

[i]f beauty “contains” the movements of the true and the good, then, because these movements are “opposed,” its own movement is a paradoxical one...: it is a single movement that *ends* in two places at once, in both the subject and the object.... The only way of conceiving it is as one act with two principles, which are...not unrelated to each other but have a mutual interdependence. It is *one* act with *two* sources. Thus, another way of expressing beauty as a relation with two termini is to say that *beauty is reciprocal causality itself*.²²⁶

We can add that this dramatic reciprocal causality is asymmetrical. This asymmetry concerns how, although beauty is a single act with two sources and two end points, relative priority is given to the object or the subject, respectively. Thus, as regards beauty’s two sources, the appearance of the object’s radiant *Gestalt* has relative priority. Nevertheless, the object’s appearance as beautiful simultaneously depends on the subject’s openness to the object. Conversely, this encounter ends with a relative finality in the subject’s disinterested enjoyment of the object, and yet this is inseparable from the subject’s being transport towards the object which retains its ever-greater difference from the subject. This asymmetry of the reciprocal causality underpins the self-transcending dramatic tension that characterises the encounter between the object and subject in the event of beauty and opens fruitfully beyond itself to manifest being’s infinite depth and gratuity.

Understanding beauty as asymmetrical reciprocal causality sheds light on the character of beauty’s groundlessness. The latter is no purely unmediated groundlessness. Instead, beauty’s groundlessness is, in fact, the mutual grounded-ness that obtains between subject and object in their mutually interdependent and self-transcending movement that opens to being’s ever-greater excess. This is groundless insofar as neither subject or object alone, nor in relation, are the causes of

²²⁴ *GL4*, 38.

²²⁵ Schindler, “Love and Beauty,” 355-356.

²²⁶ *DST*, 405-406. Schindler here draws on Kovach, *Die Ästhetik des Thomas*, 212–213.

being's manifestation as beautiful. Beauty is an event jointly caused by, but also exceeding the subject-object encounter. This connection between beauty as asymmetrical reciprocal causality and being's grace-like groundlessness as gift, together with the wonder beauty evokes, further explains why Balthasar associates beauty with joy – where wonder arises from mutuality and difference.²²⁷

Fifthly, and finally, given that beauty is the union of the good and the true, they too exhibit the same asymmetrical reciprocal causality and mutual grounded-ness that is the mediation of being's gratuitous excess. We saw earlier how the good cannot simply be a matter of the will's ecstatic movement towards the object without the will incorporating something like the intellect's receptivity; nor can truth simply be a matter of the intellect's receptivity to the subject without a will-like activity. United in beauty, both the good and the true are 'dramatically complexified by a countermovement within itself, which is to say that there is a resistance in each case to a tensionless collapse into a single direction.'²²⁸ The asymmetrical reciprocal causality manifested in beauty applies, therefore, to each of the transcendentals. As Schindler explains,

once we have secured the "mediated immediacy" of the two in a third *in principle*, we are freed to see it everywhere. There is therefore an importance sense in which...goodness contains both beauty and truth, and truth contains goodness and beauty – precisely because beauty contains goodness and truth.... In other words, *each of the transcendentals is in some respect a relationship with two termini*.... [T]hey must both end in difference ways in the subject and object, and in this way form the reciprocal movement of circumincessive, dramatic encounter.²²⁹

We have seen this played out in the polarities that characterise the narrative structure of the soul's encounter with being according to each transcendental. Each is a single, complex and paradoxical movement that has simultaneously two points of origin and two end points in the subject and object. That this asymmetrical reciprocal causality characterises each of the relational transcendentals accounts for how goodness and true share in beauty's openness to being's excessive superabundance, and therefore, the latter's groundlessness, wonder, joy and grace-like quality.²³⁰

²²⁷ *TL1*, 221-225.

²²⁸ Schindler, "Beauty and the Analogy of Truth," 311.

²²⁹ *DST*, 408.

²³⁰ Cf., *TL1*, 221-225.

7. Love as the 'Transcendental Par Excellence'²³¹

The asymmetrical reciprocal causality and mutual grounded-ness that characterises the relational transcendentals explains why, for Balthasar, love is 'the hidden ground underlying the transcendentals and their circumincessive relation.'²³² To associate love with the transcendentals as a whole and so a comprehensive sense of being's actuality reflects Balthasar's ontological notion of love examined in chapter one where being is divine gift characterised by a receptive and self-giving act of letting be. This reiterates that love here is not simply an act of feeling or will but has its beginning in beauty, its central pivot in the realm of action and freedom, and culmination in truth and so engages, heart, will and mind.²³³ This comprehensive transcendental perspective explains how Balthasar's ultimate prioritisation of love cannot dispense with truth even as it exceeds truth.²³⁴ As Schindler states, this means that the generosity associated with a selfless love cannot simply about moral action and the good; love also 'has an aesthetic, i.e., is a matter essentially of beauty... and... a logic, i.e., is a matter essentially of truth....'²³⁵ Love thoroughly permeates being and so pervades how a subject perceives, acts, and knows.

As explored earlier, Balthasar roots love's beginning in a person's awe-filled perception of being in beauty's concrete radiant appearance as *Gestalt*. Here love denotes the actively receptive movement of the human heart in wonder at being's gift-like appearance in concrete beings. This makes love not merely about the subject's possession of an object to fulfil its desire, but the enjoyment of the object in its abiding difference. Beauty's grace-likeness underpins love's 'non-possessiveness.'²³⁶ Due to the ecstatic openness effected in the subject by beauty, the subject's whole being is transformed, including, therefore, its desire and intellect. 'We not only feel differently after a deep experience of beauty, we not only have the direction of our lives altered, but we also

²³¹ *TL2*, 177.

²³² *TL1*, 9.

²³³ Some interpret Balthasar's emphasis on love in light of an Augustinian prioritisation of love and therefore, the will, and so finally voluntarism against a Thomist emphasis on the intellect's primacy. See, e.g., Ide, *Être et mystère*, 157–159. This fuels claims that Balthasar undermines philosophy and reason, and his dogmatic theology tends towards irrationalism evidenced by his account of surprise within the Trinity. See Bernard Blankenhorn, "Balthasar's Method of Divine Naming," *Nova et Vetera* 1.2, (2003): 245–268; and Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 120–132. For references to this debate and a rebuttal rooted in the transcendentals, see Schindler, "Non-Possessive Concept Of Knowledge," 579-580.

²³⁴ '[T]ruth serves love, while love embraces and transcends truth. Truth is the unveiling of being; the laws of love are its limit and measure. Love, on the other hand, has no measure and no limit other than itself.' *TL1*, 127.

²³⁵ Schindler, "Non-Possessive Concept of Knowledge," 591.

²³⁶ Schindler, "Love and Beauty," 350.

see differently....²³⁷ This affirms the importance not just of the will but the intellect to love. Beauty calls to and moves the whole subject whose response in love necessarily includes yet transcends the intellectual freedom of the subject.

Following from this, the fruitfulness of love's response to beauty anticipates, initiates, and awaits the full appropriation by the subject in the order of the good. Love's response to beauty must be deepened and, indeed, tested, through the subject's freedom and self-giving commitment while being open to the goodness of the object-in-itself. This culminates in truth where love entails both a fundamental trust of the object and the disclosure of the object as an intelligible, meaningful, determinate thing-in-itself that shimmers with ever-greater mystery that is a new event of beauty. Love as the overarching transcendental thus fully discloses how truth entails a transformation of both subject and object beyond themselves in a greater shared communion which more fully affirms their essential meaning and distinctiveness. Therefore against claims that elevating love foments irrationalism, 'the superiority of love, far from compromising the integrity of truth, is in fact the very thing that safeguards it...in itself and...within its essential relationship with all the other transcendentals.'²³⁸ Seen according to the circumincession of the transcendentals, goodness and truth are key moments of love as the overarching transcendental of being, but only insofar as they remain rooted in the gratuity and freedom of beauty.²³⁹

This develops Balthasar's claim that love is inchoately present in any concrete manifestation of being because being's polar unity between *esse* and *ens* is 'the ontic first step of what love is among free entities.'²⁴⁰ Balthasar holds that the real distinction underpins the connectedness, communication, exchange and 'mutual inhabitation' between self-conscious beings.²⁴¹ This is fully unfolded as love within spiritual nature and its interaction with the beautiful *Gestalten* of the objects it encounters which then reaches fruition in the good and true. Indeed, there is here an interdependence and analogy between a subject's encounter with being's beauty and interpersonal love. As Balthasar says,

[j]ust as in mutual human love, where the other *as* other is encountered in a freedom that will never be brought under my control, so too in aesthetic perception it is impossible to

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

²³⁸ Schindler, "Non-Possessive Concept Of Knowledge," 590-591.

²³⁹ Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 125, critiques Balthasar for making love 'more fundamental than being or knowing.' Schindler, 'Non-Possessive Conception of Knowledge,' 601n.64, notes, however, that Levering distorts Balthasar's position by claiming Balthasar places love beyond being while ignoring Balthasar's insistence that 'love is not prior to being but is the supreme act of being.' See *TL2*, 177n.9.

²⁴⁰ *E*, 56.

²⁴¹ *E*, 57.

reduce the appearing form [*Gestalt*] to my own power of imagination. In both cases, “to understand” what reveals itself does not mean to subsume it under master categories; neither love in the freedom of its grace nor the beautiful in its gratuitousness are things “to be produced” (Rilke), least of all on the basis of a “need” on the part of the subject.²⁴²

While the aesthetic and the personal aspects of love analogously echo each other, it is the personal that ultimately expresses the core of love. ‘Love does not come to man “from outside” because the human spirit is tied to the senses, but because love exists only between persons, a fact that every philosophy tends to forget.’²⁴³ The love that fully articulates the relational transcendentals and being's actuality as reciprocal causality thus has its fullest expression in the love between persons, even as this interpersonal love is always born of beauty, freely enacted in goodness and communicated in truth wherein its beauty shines further. As Balthasar states, paraphrasing Dante, ‘personal love and the shaping of the universe are mutually conditioned.’²⁴⁴

8. Transcendentals and the Constitutive Human Relationships

With this, I consider how the transcendentals relate to the metaphysical significance of the constitutive human relationships, drawing on the previous chapter's conclusion that love between persons is shaped by its primordial beginnings in the relationships between child and parents, and the sexes. I show that the constitutive human relationships are not mere instances, but paradigmatic, of the asymmetrical reciprocal causality between subject and object that characterises the transcendentals as love.

This rests on Balthasar's alignment of the relationship between being and spirit at the core of the transcendentals with the constitutive human relationships. Balthasar thus develops Aquinas' understanding that the transcendental relationship depends the spiritual soul being *quodammodo omnia*,²⁴⁵ and, *aliquid quod natum sit convenire cum omni ente*.²⁴⁶ While the latter is normally translated ‘something which is such that it agrees with all being,’ in Balthasar's thought *natum* is better rendered as ‘born.’ Thus, the spiritual soul is ‘something which is *born* to fit with all things.’ For Balthasar, being born as a child of sexual difference and awoken by love to self-consciousness are crucial to fitting with all being. We can note here Balthasar's indebtedness to Paul Claudel's correlation between *connaitre* (as ‘a coming to an inner awareness of’) and *co-naitre* (‘coming into

²⁴² *LAC*, 52-54.

²⁴³ *LAC*, 150.

²⁴⁴ *GL3*, 36.

²⁴⁵ Cf. *De Veritate*, 2.2; Aristotle, *De Anima*, 431b21.

²⁴⁶ *De Veritate* 1.1.

being with' or 'being born with') that applies to the relationship between all beings as co-determinative.²⁴⁷ As Balthasar summarises Claudel: 'In man, this becomes the knowledge of universal being...in the sense, not of abstraction, but of a being together of all things separated out into singularity.'²⁴⁸ Balthasar's contribution to this vision is to originate this awareness of the co-determinacy of all beings in beauty and how each person's heart is shaped by its origin in sexual difference and the child-parent relationship.

That Balthasar frames the encounter between the child and its parents according to the transcendentals has been alluded to throughout this thesis. To reiterate, Balthasar's primal *Gestalt* here is that of a mother's smile calling forth a smile from her child.

She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge: the initially empty-sense impressions gather meaningfully around the core of the Thou. Knowledge (with its whole complex of intuition and concept) comes into play, because the play of love has already begun beforehand, initiated by the mother, the transcendent.... [N]o child can be awakened to love without being loved.²⁴⁹

This beginning aligns with beauty's primacy, being's concrete epiphany in a radiant *Gestalt*, and the soul's loving response to it. As Balthasar insists, if humans are to live within 'an original form, that form has first to be sighted. One must possess a spiritual eye capable of perceiving (*wahrnehmen* [the seeing of what is true]) the forms of existence with awe.'²⁵⁰ This begins with the child's wholehearted loving perception of the form of its own self-conscious existence through the bestowal of that same form by adults who lovingly communicate that form. It is a beginning both precariously unique and universal. This adds a gloss to Balthasar's assertion that 'only the few who...bear the weight of the whole on their shoulders, will receive eyes to behold the primal form of man-in-existence, and...their courage to embrace this primal form will raise everything else into the light along with itself: the true, the good, and the beautiful.'²⁵¹ While the few ostensibly refers to adults, this exceptional vision is, paradoxically, universally granted to each child who affirms being as beautiful, good and true simply by awakening to themselves. As a person matures, they embrace the

²⁴⁷ TL2, 36. Cf., Paul Claudel, *Oeuvre Poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1967), 149: 'We are not born (*naissons*) alone. To be born (*naître*), for all, is to know (*connaître*). Every birth (*naissance*) is an acquaintance (*une connaissance*).' My translation.

²⁴⁸ TL2, 36.

²⁴⁹ LAC, 76

²⁵⁰ GL1, 26.

²⁵¹ GL1, 26.

primal form not by sheer will or rational deduction but via a commitment to a life of responsibility, goodness, truth and love while remaining rooted in the wonder-filled childlike perception of beauty.

In the final retrospective examination of his work, Balthasar explicitly identifies this event of the child's awakening with the relational transcendentals, their underpinning in being's unity, and their interdependence in love. He states:

[t]he infant is brought to consciousness of himself only by love, by the smile of his mother. In that encounter, the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him (1): that he is one in love with the mother, even in being other than his mother, therefore all Being is one; (2) that that love is good, therefore all Being is good; (3) that that love is true, therefore all Being is true; and (4) that that love evokes joy, therefore all Being is beautiful. We add here that the epiphany of Being has sense only if in the appearance [*Erscheinung*] we grasp the essence that manifests itself [*Ding an sich*]. The infant comes to the knowledge, not of a pure appearance, but of his mother in herself.²⁵²

The significance of this cannot be overstated. It contains *in nuce* the transcendental relationship between being and spirit. Here spirit, understood not abstractly but according to its concrete constitutive extremes (parent-child, male-female), fully manifests the fruitful excess of being's unity-in-difference in the interpersonal reciprocity of love according to being's beauty, goodness and truth.²⁵³ In short, the concrete encounter between child and mother (and, implicitly, father) manifests primordially and paradigmatically the transcendentals' fruitfulness. Balthasar makes this explicit elsewhere by identifying the child's awakening to self-consciousness as 'decisive proof' of how the relational transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth are rooted in the self-giving love shared between parents.²⁵⁴ This event unveils fully what is always already there from the beginning: the concrete nature of the fruitfulness of being's superabundant excess as it subsists as, and so depends on, spirit's own fruitful excess.

Not only is it crucial to see that the child awakens to self-consciousness through a love that is concretely perceived in awe according to a radiant *Gestalt*. It depends on the child encountering the *Gestalt* of its parents' love which mediates human nature in its transparency to being's transcendental aspects. A child does not, therefore, awaken to itself simply through the encounter with any beautiful *Gestalten* of nature, art or technology. Nor does this happen through engagement

²⁵² *MW*, 114.

²⁵³ Cf., Saint-Pierre, *Beauté, bonté, vérité*, 349-351.

²⁵⁴ *TL2*, 176.

with just any human(s). Rather, to repeat the conclusions of the previous chapters, the content of this primal *Gestalt* embodies the love of an adult parent – a love already lived out between adult parents as shared with the child. Such parental love must remain rooted in the relational transcendentals to communicate the metaphysically fruitful nature of the relationship between being and spirit. This raises the question of how this paradigmatic enactment of the transcendental is related to the parent-child relationship and the sexual difference between the parents.

Let me consider these in turn. Regarding the child, when it awakens to itself through the love of others, and responds with the gift of itself, the circumincession of the relational transcendentals and their orientation to the wholly other order of being's unity as divine gift come to light all at once. Goodness and truth are wholly aligned within beauty. This is, for Balthasar, characteristic of youth which is marked by the 'sunrise of the spirit's splendour in the beauty of form...in which the spirit plays in the body unselfconsciously.'²⁵⁵ The child, however, must grow up and engage with the beautiful with greater freedom and responsibility. This heralds the 'age of dignity': out of a youth 'fully governed by the aesthetic principle there breaks forth the ethical on account of the spirit's stronger radiance. But the ethical does not then question the legitimacy of beauty, rather does it reveal itself as beauty's inner coordinate axis, which enables beauty to unfold to its full dimensionality as a transcendental attribute of Being.' The beautiful now carries a sense of urgency and decision. While this applies, to a greater or lesser degree, to every encounter with beauty, fundamentally it concerns the decision of what to freely commit one's life to as an adult. Balthasar is clear about the stakes involved. The spirit is 'forever confronted by a decision between the abyss of heaven and of hell,' and so 'the beauty of any form must remain in the twilight of the question as to which of the two masters' glory such form radiates.'²⁵⁶ Even more fundamentally, this concerns a decision about whether truthfully to enact the comprehensive primal form of human nature so as to integrate the childlike wonder at its core. This commitment is something that is expressed fully only in the shared context of truth and so the meaningful and fruitful exchanges based around language where language itself is the concrete medium of being's fruitful communication.

This brings us to the parents. Because the awe-filled vision of the primal form of human nature is bestowed first to a person as a child who is utterly dependent on others, this places a burden of metaphysical responsibility on those who raise the young. They must freely embrace and remain faithful to the primal form of human existence as it expresses being's transcendental aspects. Indeed, when Balthasar states the child's awakening to self-consciousness through its parents' love

²⁵⁵ *GL1*, 22.

²⁵⁶ *GL1*, 23.

is decisive proof of the reciprocal causality of the transcendentals, he states that the good is more transcendent than the other transcendentals.²⁵⁷ This rightly emphasises how the love parents share for each other, and with their child, is a free self-giving commitment of their whole selves beyond themselves in openness to being's goodness as shared between them and their child.

As noted earlier, however, the greater transcendence of the good cannot leave the other transcendentals behind. Thus, Balthasar qualifies the good's greater transcendence. It 'does not oblige us to sacrifice the priority of truth and its ontological transcendence.'²⁵⁸ Indeed, after speaking of how love is linked to the greater transcendence of the good, Balthasar affirms that '[g]roundless love is not prior to being but is the supreme act of being, the reef that shatters every attempt at conceptual capture.'²⁵⁹ Hence, '[l]ove can...be considered the supreme mode, and therein the "truth", of being, without, for all that, having to be transported beyond truth and being.'²⁶⁰ More fully, given the circumincession of the transcendentals, the parents' free self-giving in the good, to be an expression of love, must arise from, be rooted in, and constitute a deepening of beauty, and culminate in the objective fruitfulness of truth in its openness to beauty. This is not achieved solely through the parents' will or intellect. The transformation of their vision and desire is initiated by their encounter with being's beauty in the *Gestalt* of their child, each other and their shared life. Indeed, before the vulnerability of a child, adults face the same demand Balthasar identifies with any moment of beauty: 'that man pursue the good by compelling him to be true to the living content whose external forms he represents.'²⁶¹

Hence, the parents' sharing of being's beauty must carry over into the good and true. They cannot remain simply in beauty without falsifying it. Beauty achieves full expression in the freedom and dramatic action of the good, and in the shared communication of the true which, in hospitality to being's ever-greater mystery, shines anew with the beautiful splendour of being's inexhaustible vitality. It is, indeed, only in this culmination in truth's concrete *Gestalten* that adults express faithfully their own childlike wonder at being's beauty in the fullness of love as the overarching transcendental. This translates into the truthfulness of the activities that fruitfully shape the life and home the parents share. It also stresses, regarding their child and each other, the ontological significance of the act of judgement, language and any shared meaningful activity wherein truth shines out with being's superabundant radiant revitalising beauty. Indeed, these find their

²⁵⁷ *TL2*, 176-177.

²⁵⁸ *TL2*, 177n.7.

²⁵⁹ *TL2*, 177n.9.

²⁶⁰ *TL2*, 178.

²⁶¹ *GL1*, 25.

metaphysical measure in the human constitutive relationships, particularly, in how parents shape the heart, memory, language and freedom of their child.

This accords with the insistence that the parents' enactment of the good and the true remain rooted in the beautiful, even as these fulfil the beautiful. The primacy of beauty calls the parents to abide in what is first freely given as groundless gift from beyond themselves and is manifested in the fruitfulness of their shared interaction. Here the primacy of beauty aligns with the freely-bestowed, intrinsically complete, and conditioned fruitfulness of sexual difference and the parent-child relationship.

9. Beauty and the Constitutive Human Relationships

This claim underpins this thesis. To state it fully, and drawing on the previous chapters' insights, this associates the distinctiveness of beauty, as the primary relational transcendental, with the love between persons who embody the polar extremes of the different yet correlated ways of being the same single spiritual embodied nature. In making this connection, we must recall that beauty's primacy is a matter not of necessity but fittingness, albeit a fittingness paradoxically needed to safeguard the gratuity at the core of the transcendentals. My claim is that this applies also to the metaphysical significance of the child-parent relationship and sexual difference. Any necessity that attaches to these ways of constituting human nature is best understood as that of ungrounded fittingness rather than sheer objective necessity. The fittingness of beauty's primacy aligns with the gratuitous character of a child's being born and awoken to self-consciousness through the fruitfulness of, the equally gratuitous, reality of sexual difference and an interpersonal love freely-bestowed that analogously takes its fruitful character from, yet transcends, the gift-like fruitfulness of sexual difference.

Beauty is, therefore, the fabric of these relationships. This can be interpreted in light of how beauty's groundlessness is, in fact, a mutual grounded-ness between irreducible but correlated poles that mediate the ever-greater gift of being. Sexual difference and the parent-child relationship are groundless because mutually grounded in each other. In drawing this parallel, I am arguing these reciprocal relationships are not just instances of beauty but express the fitting good truth that beauty is the primary transcendental. They are the paradigmatic instance of being's mutual grounded-ness as beauty. Moreover, they are paradigmatic for how beauty is mediated via goodness and truth, and, conversely, for how the good and true remain embedded in beauty's grace-like quality. This is reflected particularly in truth's status as the ultimate relational transcendental where truth's fruitfulness echoes that of the constitutive human relationships. Being's truth is the objective

fruit of the self-giving union between subject and object in the good expressed in new *Gestalten* that manifest afresh the concrete radiance of beauty.

This can be analysed according to the asymmetrical reciprocal causality of beauty's mutual grounded-ness wherein object and subject are co-agents. Male and female are not simply subjects understood according to a single abstract notion of human nature. They are subjects in a distinct yet correlated way. Put differently, they are subjects and objects to each other where their encounter unveils the infinite fruitfulness of their spiritual nature's capacity to reflect being as a whole. Both manifest being's beauty to the other with the priority that attends the object's radiant appearance; and, both respond to the other as a subject in the freedom of their awe-filled perception. They do so as the extreme limits of being fully human. Hence, they communicate the abiding priority of the object's ever-greater excess to each other within the freedom of their shared spiritual nature. They display, therefore, to a maximal degree the fruitfulness of beauty's mutual grounded-ness. Hence, male and female are concrete principles of beauty. The truth of this is confirmed by how their fruitfulness intrinsically opens to and constitutes the overarching *Gestalt* of human nature in the parent-child relationship which is, therefore, also a concrete co-principle of beauty. Here too parents and child are objects and subjects to each other yet in this case each parent has a responsibility to the child in communicating the *Gestalt* of their shared nature in its openness to being according to the transcendentals.

This echoes how Balthasar affirms Aquinas' reading of the causal significance of beauty in his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius' *Divine Names*.²⁶² Aquinas holds that God creates not out of need but by 'the love he has for his own beauty, for whoever has beauty of his own wants to multiply it as much as possible, that is, through the communication of his likeness.... Thus everything is created in order as far as possible to imitate the divine beauty.'²⁶³ As Balthasar emphasises, 'this is true as much of the particular forms, by which things are distinguished from one another, as for the common possession of being, in which they communicate.'²⁶⁴ As Aquinas states, 'out of the beautiful, *esse* comes to everything that exists,' and this occurs insofar 'as every form, through which a thing has *esse*, is a certain participation of the divine *claritas*'²⁶⁵ My contention is that within the realm of secondary causality, the fruitful creativity of beauty, understood in terms of mutual

²⁶² *GL4*, 410.

²⁶³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, ed. C. Pera et al. (Turin: Marietti, 1950), 4.5. Balthasar's translation at *GL4*, 410.

²⁶⁴ *GL4*, 410.

²⁶⁵ Aquinas, *de Divinis Nominibus*, 4.5. On beauty and causality in Aquinas and Pseudo-Dionysius, see Brendan T. Sammon, *The God Who Is Beauty: Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2014), 307-326.

grounded-ness, receives its paradigmatic expression in the constitutive human relationships. That said, beauty's creativity is enacted differently with respect to each constitutive relationship. I examine this now according to how beauty is, first, the concrete unity of the good and the true; and, second, opens to being's ever-greater transcendent unity as divine gift.

Thus, to consider first a child's birth and awakening as new spirit. While these events, as fruit and proof of the reciprocal causality of the relational transcendentals enacted by the parents, are associated with truth as the fruitful culmination of beauty and goodness; nonetheless, the concrete new *Gestalt* of this truth exceeds the parents. It is the wholly gratuitous gift of a new self-conscious being who shines with the radiance of being's superabundance. The child's beauty brings out, therefore, the gratuitous and wholly other order of being's transcendent unity as *esse* that is immanent to the relational transcendentals, a beauty which is the mark of their source in and orientation to God. Furthermore, this identification of the child with beauty's transcendent openness to *esse* informs, as noted above, how the child's personal enactment of the transcendentals encompasses them all at once in its wholehearted response to its parents' love.

By contrast, the parents' sexual difference, and its organic and personal fruitfulness, are especially associated with beauty as the concrete union of good and true, and so with the dynamic of beauty's transcendent immanence to these orders. The union in truth that comes from the sharing of male and female humanity in their mutual freedom in the order of the good is a new radiant *Gestalt* that discloses their distinctive way of being human together, whether or not a child is conceived. Nevertheless, while this new *Gestalt* is the fruit and so the truth of the goodness of their union and the beauty of their mutual grounded-ness, it does not of itself communicate the full extent of their fruitful enactment of being's unity-in-difference as spirits. Their union points beyond itself to the decisive proof of a new child awoken to self-consciousness. This stresses that while neither female nor male constitute each other *per se*, each is dependent on the other to be what it already is in relation to the greater whole. Their union expresses this greater whole most comprehensively insofar as it steps beyond to a fourth, which is the wholly different order of being's creative actuality as is manifested in the gift of a child awoken as spirit. Furthermore, the way the parents' sexual difference and its fruitfulness encompass beauty's union of the good and true informs how they enact their interpersonal fruitfulness. Indeed, their organic fruitfulness only attains full expression as personal with the free self-giving in the order of goodness and the life-giving exchange and creative judgment and disclosure of the true.

10. Male and Female as Principles of Beauty

We can now ask how this paradigmatic association of beauty with sexual difference plays out as distinctively female and male. As I indicated in the previous chapter's account of male and female, any response to this within the present discussion needs to follow certain restraints. I examine this from the perspective of human nature considered as a concrete whole in light of the primordial and paradigmatic status of the constitutive human relationships of which male and female are constituent parts. As with any *Gestalt*, the whole casts a clearer light on the distinctiveness of its parts. This does not deny that humans can, in fact, choose to act differently from what is disclosed about sexual difference in light of the whole. Nothing said here is necessitated but concerns what each person is beckoned to respond to in beauty as befitting the free enactment of being's fruitfulness according to the relational transcendentals. Any such enactment is judged, not according to its fidelity to a fixed abstract nature, but on whether it discloses the grace-like beauty of the truth of the primal *Gestalt* of human nature in its openness to being's ever-greater mystery as divine gift. How then do male and female differently enact beauty? To answer this, I draw on the previous chapter's discussion regarding their different roles in the act of generation and bringing a child to self-consciousness. I consider this from both an objective and subjective perspective.

Seen objectively, that is, as female and male unveil in themselves being's beauty with respect to a newly conceived child, the mother's relationship to her child manifests the transcendent immanence of being's unity within the *Gestalt* of human nature. In the act of generation, the female actively receives from the male so that she generates a new human inside her and she nourishes the child with milk from her body and encompasses it in her consciousness and embrace. The mother receives the child's being while also handing on immanently to the child the transcendent unity of human nature she shares with the father. This is oriented outward towards forming a relationship of difference between her and the child that is nonetheless held in a unity of nature. This reflects how greater transcendence and unity is expressed as greater immanence and difference within the dynamic of a radiant *Gestalt*. Here the characteristically female relationship to the child embodies the immanent radiance and fruitfulness of the self-transcending *Gestalt* that encompasses mother, child and father.

The male, by contrast, manifests the immanent transcendence of the unity of the same radiant *Gestalt*. This reflects how he generates outside his body, in the woman's body, handing on to the child the transcendent unity of human nature he shares with the mother. This manifests the transcendent radiant unity intrinsic to the radiant *Gestalt*. Put differently, the characteristically male relationship to the child immanently embodies the transcendent fruitfulness and radiance of the

same *Gestalt* that encompasses father, mother and child. That said, neither the aspect of beauty expressed in the immanent transcendence of the father-child relationship, nor the transcendent immanence of the mother-child relationship manifest the fullness of the radiant *Gestalt* of human nature. It is only in the shared unity and tension between them that their mediation of this *Gestalt* opens intrinsically to the transcendent source of unity that is the wholly other order of *esse*, most decisively disclosed in a child's birth and awakening. Mother, father and child together receive, hand on and unveil *esse's* quasi-formal pattern of fruitful letting be.

From a subject-oriented perspective, these differences between the sexes play out in their awe-filled response to the beauty of the same *Gestalt*. Thus, regarding the female response, her whole being is active and receptive towards the child in a way that does not arise from her choice, but rather enables her freely to appropriate and express this active receptivity for herself. This is a function of how, in the woman's relationship to the newly conceived child, the organic and personal are closely entwined and mediate each to the other. This underpins what is distinctive about the female response to being's beauty as it appears in the child first in the hiddenness of her womb. It enacts the rapturous response of her heart to beauty. This includes both her heart's *a priori* openness to being and its transportation beyond itself by the radiance of beauty into the realm of the good and true. The emphasis on rapture is not isolated from perception. Perception during pregnancy is at first hidden, but not blind or absent. Indeed, it is a perception wholly characterised by heartfelt rapture. Perception is thus reworked from within by rapture through the gradual felt encounter with the radiant *Gestalt* of the child's being. This entails a hidden vision effecting a hidden rapture which, as it becomes more obvious, informs and transforms perception.

This does not happen immediately, but takes time, during which the rapture of the woman's heart towards her child is something she assents to and shares with those around her and which she articulates through her free response to, judgement of, and communication about what is unveiled to her as true about being. Indeed, the mother's concrete perception of the child's difference, even as it is encompassed within the unity of her being, is underwritten by the father's difference from the mother. This unity-in-difference is enacted by them together through their mutual self-giving in the good and their shared communication in the true whereby they disclose their different ways of responding to being's beauty.

In this distinctively female emphasis on rapture, the circumincession between the relational transcendentals is particularly evident. This reflects the jointly receptive and self-giving response of the mother's heart to the child's concrete being in her womb, and the self-giving of her body whereby she enters in the self-giving of the good and discloses in her being the radiant truth of the

intelligible form of human nature. If we recall how the subjective response for each of the relational transcendentals entails a polarity, then in being predisposed to rapture, the distinctively female response to beauty carries with it, first, a predilection to the self-giving fidelity of goodness; secondly, the trust that lies at the beginning of truth; and, finally, how the determinate disclosure of truth opens up to being's ever-greater mysterious depths. The corollary of this, however, is a risk that the female enactment of the transcendentals is simply identified with rapture, self-giving fidelity, trust and mysterious depths – something which, as we have seen, problematically colours Balthasar's account of the feminine. This can, however, be interpreted positively as identifying a uniquely female metaphysical task to articulate this rapture, and how it changes perception, via the exercise of a free choice in how she fully receives and appropriates as her own the self-giving response of her heart and body. Furthermore, this carries over and finds completion in the determinate expression of the true whereby through her self-expression and language she discloses more fully the intelligible form of the reality of human nature. To use a more obvious theological image, this insists on the metaphysical significance of woman's freely-appropriated, fully articulated fiat to the rapture she experiences.

Turning to the male response to beauty, his organic engagement with the child is at a remove, and so distance and difference is emphasised. This is echoed by how, in the male's relationship to the child, the organic and personal are not intrinsically connected. What is emphasised, therefore, is how he engages personally with the mother and child in a way that affirms or denies the union of all three of them. More specifically, it is a question of whether the man's heart is open to and so goes out to the woman and child to be actively receptive to them and so enact the self-giving of goodness in truth. If this is not simply a blind act of will it must be based on the heart's rapture that accompanies the perception of a concrete *Gestalt*. This highlights what is distinctive in the male response to beauty. It is a rapture following from sense-based perception of the concrete *Gestalt* of mother and child. In contrast to the female, perception is accentuated, and rapture and transport, and the change they effect, more hidden. In all this, the father's concrete perception of the child and their shared unity within their difference is safeguarded by the mother's unity with him. As with the mother, this takes time to encounter and adjust to, and depends on their mutual self-giving in the good and their shared communication in the true which incorporates their different responses to beauty.

Regarding the male enactment of the circumincession of the transcendentals, the focus on perception emphasises in the order of the good a determinative choice towards self-giving fidelity to the mother and child. It also reflects how truth is disclosed to male understanding in its determinate

concepts even as this opens to mystery. The potential risk here is that the male's response to beauty is simply identified with a sense-based perception such that it cuts out the *a priori* rapture of the heart. This in turn risks prioritising choice in the order of the good, including a wholly arbitrary choice of self-giving, and, in the order of the true, emphasising determinate concepts, including the abstract concept of indeterminate mystery beyond truth, rather than an ongoing encounter with mystery in more-than-simply-determinate *Gestalten*. As we have seen, this is something Balthasar tends towards. Framed positively, however, this means the male metaphysical task is to ensure that his determinate perception and choice is rooted in the gratuitous rapture of the beautiful that underpins the self-giving fidelity of the good, and expressed in the element of trust in the true and in how the determinate clarity of the true opens to the ever-greater radiance of beauty. This identifies a distinctively male fiat with a willingly open heart that abides more deeply and faithfully in the determinate perception of beauty and the choice this elicits.

The upshot of this double perspective is that the personal metaphysical tasks of each sex with respect to the transcendentals reflects what comes more naturally to the other in their response to and articulation of beauty as manifested paradigmatically in their child's birth and awakening. In the female, what arises more naturally is a rapture that informs and transforms perception; whereas in the male it is a perception that opens to and is transformed by rapture. Furthermore, this mirrors how the female with child objectively manifests beauty's transcendent immanence and the male manifests vis-à-vis the same child beauty's immanent transcendence. This develops the observation, articulated in the previous chapter, that by remaining true to one's own sex one comes closest to the other. It also lends support to, yet reinterprets, Balthasar's view that the male must somehow be female. This is achieved by remaining true to the distinctively male response to beauty, not by appropriating what is properly female as Balthasar is prone to do. Conversely, this requires that the female, in being true to her femaleness, is more male-like in her response to beauty. Taken together, the sexes in their distinct yet correlated way concretely enact the self-transcending orientation of human nature in its openness to the gift of being's beauty. Finally, in enacting their shared capacity as adult parents according to the correlation between male and female responses to beauty, they paradoxically give expression to the wholly other way of being human, their common childlikeness. They enable each other to be childlike in their fundamental openness to the wonder of being.

11. Conclusion

The observations made above are not meant to be an exhaustive statement of the difference between the sexes, nor exclusively apply to all humans as the only way to be fruitful. They do, however, attempt to articulate the minimum required to safeguard the whole. This claims,

therefore, that the unity-in-difference which constitutes human nature and is disclosed in the uniqueness of each person is dependent on the shared enactment of the analogy of being by male and female humanity, and child and parent. This gives metaphysical priority and ultimacy to how we are each constituted within and shaped by the polarity of sexual difference that stretches between the extremes of male and female, and that of parent and child. Although paradigmatic, however, these constitutive extreme instances of being human cannot be separated from the dramatic enactment between actual persons and the ever-greater disclosure of the *Gestalt* of human nature that occurs in the order of the true through freely shared communication and meaningful activity. This involves always discovering more about the mysterious truth of human nature in its openness to the gift-like event of beauty. It is this path of discovery that is safeguarded by these extremes ways of being human in their responses to beauty and enactment of the transcendentals.

In this light, I revisit Balthasar's statements about sexual difference. Despite the problems with Balthasar's interpretation, as examined in chapter three, I contend some of his insights about the tension between the fruitfulness of sexual difference and the productivity of an increasingly technological age remain valuable when adjusted for this chapter's findings.

Balthasar identifies the dominance of a 'positivistic, technology-oriented thinking' with two factors. First, the preponderance of a masculine perspective linked to a 'technologized way of life' and 'the prevalence of a rationalism to which natural things and conditions mean above all material for manufacturables.'²⁶⁶ He couples this to an approach that lauds what humans wilfully make of themselves and the world.²⁶⁷ Here nature becomes 'mere material; even the spirit itself is in danger of becoming material for self-manipulation, and being as a whole, as unreifiable, is overlooked.'²⁶⁸ This threatens a reduction to a 'pure positivism of "making" – and in the end of self-making' which is 'without norms and thus without direction.'²⁶⁹ Balthasar diagnoses thereby a dominant technological worldview with a masculinism rooted in a rationalism and voluntarism predicated on an epoch-defining forgetfulness of being. Secondly, in this situation the female is forgotten. Balthasar insists this forgetfulness cannot be addressed by mere reasoning or by women pursuing 'an unnatural

²⁶⁶ *NE*, 188.

²⁶⁷ Cf., Cyril O'Regan, "Von Balthasar's Valorizations and Critique of Heidegger's Genealogy of Modernity," in *Christian Spirituality and the Culture of Modernity*, ed. Peter J. Casarella and George P. Schnier (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 150, who comments that Balthasar judges that 'German thought's most feminine gestures are contaminated with masculine urges, we are put on notice that the will to power can masquerade as *Gelassenheit* [letting-be].' My contention is Balthasar's thought is contaminated with a caricature of the feminine and masculine.

²⁶⁸ *NE*, 189-190

²⁶⁹ *NE*, 190.

masculinization...or a levelling of the difference between the sexes.²⁷⁰ This 'would totally destroy the [already] disturbed balance, level the all-fructifying difference between the sexes in favour of an asexuality (with male indications, however) and consume humanity's last ideological reserves.'²⁷¹ While Balthasar affirms the importance of culture for creativity, he insists culture be rooted in an attitude that contemplates nature receptively. It is this element of culture that is threatened by the above. Balthasar proposes that women here play a decisive role as the 'counterpoise to and spearhead against man's increasingly history-less world...'²⁷² This involves 'creating a vital force against history-less, technologized existence, in abstaining from the artificial superabundance being offered with a view to noticing anew the real "superabundance of life"....'.²⁷³ Thus far, Balthasar rightly defends a reciprocity between the sexes in their difference.

However, as he progresses Balthasar exhibits, by now familiar, difficulties. He argues for a feminine 'contemplative-receptive glance' rather than a masculine calculating and functional one; a feminine element 'that makes a person *secure* in nature and in being' rather than a 'masculine element' which penetrates and changes things by 'implanting' something of its own.²⁷⁴ This rehearses Balthasar's deficient view of sexual intercourse. Equally unsatisfactorily, he defines woman by her significance for man. She should be geared 'to being, to the background that gives meaning to things, to security, to making a home for man who is always on the run, exposed to the world'²⁷⁵ To paraphrase the last chapter's critique, this expects too little from men, and too much from women.

We can extend this critique via the transcendentals. Rather than linking the sexes to distinctions of emphasis in beauty, its circumincession with goodness and truth, and their transcendence into being's ever-greater unity, Balthasar assigns to each sex isolated moments of the good and true. Thus, he associates the male with wilful choice and so a goodness and will separated from the active receptivity of the beautiful and the ecstatic receptivity of the true. Most basically, Balthasar excludes a distinctive experience of wonder, and so beauty, from the male heart, emphasising the male inability to be self-giving in receptivity to what is beyond himself. To remedy this, Balthasar problematically suggests the male appropriate the female womb's active receptivity which he associates with a contemplative receptivity and the self-giving fidelity of goodness.

²⁷⁰ NE, 188.

²⁷¹ NE, 190.

²⁷² NE, 191.

²⁷³ NE, 191.

²⁷⁴ NE, 189.

²⁷⁵ NE, 190.

By contrast, Balthasar identifies the female, firstly, with a pure receptivity and so a sense of the intellect and truth dissociated from the receptive activity of the beautiful and the active free choice of the good. Secondly, he identifies the female with a pure selfless self-giving and so a goodness disconnected from beauty's active receptivity. Again, primordially, this excludes a uniquely female experience of wonder at beauty, specifically, the active element of the heart's response, and undercuts the freedom this engenders. This denies woman the capacity to choose to appropriate fully the movement of her heart. Furthermore, Balthasar offers no corrective by allowing the female to enact a male-like activity.

In both cases, Balthasar disassociates the sexes from beauty, aligning them univocally with isolated moments of goodness and truth. The latter are made extrinsic to beauty and, therefore, each other, and are uprooted from the asymmetrical reciprocal exchange that marks the transcendentals. Indeed, regarding both sexes, he forgets the childlike wonder of the adult heart in response to beauty. The consequence is the dissolution of the transcendentals' circumincession. Thus, I agree with Kilby that, regarding male and female humanity, Balthasar makes no 'consistent mention of beauty, or allure, or *desire*.... It is sexual reproduction, rather than sexual love, that seems to govern Balthasar's "nuptial" thought.'²⁷⁶ Though Schindler rightly offers a corrective in highlighting the centrality of desire to Balthasar, his criticism of Kilby falls short by not engaging with her concern that Balthasar does not fully consider how male and female experience beauty.²⁷⁷ Balthasar jeopardises the significance of the joint male-female enactment of beauty which, I have argued, underpins his view of the transcendentals.

By the logic of Balthasar's metaphysics, however, equal significance should be given to the female predisposition to rapture at the hidden radiance of beauty and the male propensity for the perception of the determinate *Gestalt*. This requires not, as Balthasar asserts, simply a feminine response to a world forgetful of being's beauty, but a response which spans and fruitfully exceeds the extremes of male and female humanity, including how each sex exercises a response to beauty analogous to what is pronounced in the other. This corrects the imbalance where Balthasar allows the male to enact a feminine active receptivity but denies anything analogous to the female appropriating the male's activity. Furthermore, the fruitfulness of the sexes' shared enterprise rests on their mutual grounded-ness, their joint custodianship of beauty's groundlessness, which points beyond them to the divine source of being's unity as a gift to be shared.

²⁷⁶ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 138-139. Cf., *Ibid.*, 139n.36. Kilby's concern needs to be tempered by, for example, Balthasar's treatment of Dante in *GL3*.

²⁷⁷ Schindler, "'A Very Critical Response'," 73.

We might ask whether Kilby's concern about Balthasar's predominant focus on sexual reproduction applies to the above. In response, first, I reiterate that Balthasar is not only concerned with sexual fruitfulness but more fundamentally with the fruitfulness of interpersonal love and its importance to the meta-anthropological service of the whole. While the latter has its paradigmatic expression in the fruit of a child born of sexual difference and awakened to self-conscious freedom by the love of its parents, it cannot be limited to this but finds fulfilment in the myriad ways people express interpersonal fruitfulness. Secondly, while agreeing that Balthasar does often reduce fruitfulness to sexual reproduction, I have argued this does not undermine the integrity of his metaphysics. This is because fruitfulness is an overarching transcendental rooted in the beautiful and its circumincession with the good and true. It need not be interpreted in exclusively reductionist terms to say this fruitfulness is paradigmatically expressed in the reciprocity of love shared between male and female persons who constitute correlated ways of being the same spiritual nature that transcends itself. Nonetheless, it does maintain that being born of sexual difference and awoken to self-consciousness as a child by parental love is of abiding significance to enacting the transcendentals aright as love. This affirms that these constitutive relationships underpin the human capacity to perceive with childlike wonder the primal form of human existence, and so being's primal form, and, therefore, ensure that this form is communicated anew as loving gift.

Conclusion

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.¹

What should we hand on to our children? Balthasar's metaphysics answers this question by recasting it as the most basic philosophical question: why anything, instead of nothing? He thus subverts the expectation of a precise, predetermined answer. His response to both is the same: childlike wonder. This is meant, objectively, as the miraculous wonder of the child's existence and, more fully, being itself; and, subjectively, as the wondering of a child's heart. The legacy we bequeath our children, therefore, is one we paradoxically receive from them and alongside them in wholehearted adult remembrance of, and responsibility for, the value of their and our childlikeness. We are to bestow upon our little ones what we receive freely as children: the heart's attunement to being's beauty and joy as loving gift; how this gratuitous joyful beauty of love is encountered, denied and reclaimed anew in our lives; and how it transforms us in openness to the ever-greater divine source of being's creativity. In short, we are to communicate to our children what we too depend upon – love's own fruitfulness as the meaning of being.

Balthasar sees this as a task that belongs to every human by virtue of having been born to and nurtured by sexually differentiated parents and awoken to self-consciousness by them or other parental figures. Balthasar thus makes metaphysics a truly concrete and catholic vocation. This is a calling that belongs to all who have ever been, are and will be children. Yet, each child is brought to this only by others. And so, because of their heart's openness to being's beauty and joy, each child is exposed to the risk of love's absence. This means the capacity of each person to engage with being itself as a child hinges on how we are each welcomed by our parents and adult guardians. Theirs is an intimately personal summons expressed either as open-hearted receptive welcome to the child as gift in its difference from and dependence on them; or, as hard-hearted denial. Either response coalesces around and shapes our heart's consent to being even as it is knit together in the hiddenness of our mother's womb and heart, and then nurtured or neglected in family and home. At the centre of Balthasar's vision, therefore, lies the claim that metaphysics stands or falls on whether it serves the inviolable wonder of childhood. This is entrusted to a humanity whose capacity for childlike wonder and for living out freely being's gift-character is not simply down to individual choice but underpinned by two extreme different ways of being fully human that embody being's orientation to birth and wonder: male and female.

¹ Isaiah, 11:6-9.

I have offered a critical apologia for this vision in three interlocking ways. I have, first, analysed and clarified Balthasar's understanding of being, self-conscious spirit, being's transcendental aspects, and how these relate to the relationships between a child and its parents, and the fruitfulness of human sexual difference. I have argued that Balthasar's metaphysics identifies the child-parent and male-female relationships as primordial and paradigmatic ways of being fully human that safeguard the wonder of being as manifested in the unity-in-difference between beings, and, particularly, persons. Balthasar's view supports the notion that, though primordial and paradigmatic, these relationships are not exclusive. Though they underpin how humans enact being as gift, they do not exclude but liberate the endless creativity of interpersonal activity. This comes down to whether each person lives as an adult who rejects childhood and so their being's dependency on gift; or, grows ever-more deeply into the reality of being a child in thanksgiving for the gift of being. Secondly, I have criticised how Balthasar falls short of this vision in his essentialist account of the difference between male and female humanity. However, I have also argued that Balthasar's metaphysics supports an alternative view of sexual difference which affirms an asymmetrical reciprocity between male and female as differently active and receptive in their shared enactment of the transcendence of humanity's spiritual openness to *esse*. Thirdly, this apologia is also a critically vital one that has sought to defend a vision of the human as created with the capacity to wonder at the beauty of the gift of being and to communicate that wonder amid the different ways humans undermine it.

To this end, in chapter one, I expounded how, for Balthasar, metaphysics begins in the wonder at being itself and, specifically, the wonder of a child's first self-conscious encounter with *esse* as mediated through its mother's concrete love. In this wonder, the whole of created being is manifested in its concrete, dramatic and self-exceeding primal *Gestalt*. The latter represents Balthasar's concrete rendering of being's analogical nature. It encompasses in a single complex whole the asymmetrical reciprocal relationship between *esse* and essence that characterises every being. The mutual dependency between these principles points beyond the whole to its dependency on and manifestation of God's gift of *esse* which brings each being into existence. The divine provenance of *esse* and each being's essential reality is, moreover, manifested concretely within created being as a reciprocal letting be shared between beings. This is the pattern of love. Central is Balthasar's adaption of *esse* as non-subsistent: the pure actuality of *esse*, which brings all things into being and is God's divine *esse* truly given away, is dependent on the essential reality of beings to subsist concretely. Each being is true to the gift-character of their origin insofar as they enact, according to their nature, their participation in the superabundant letting be of *esse* by sharing *esse* with others. This loving pattern of being receives its fullest expression in interpersonal relationships

of love. Indeed, it begins in how each person encounters being first in specific anthropological and interpersonal relationships which are, therefore, privileged sites of metaphysical disclosure.

In chapter two, I examined the implications of Balthasar's understanding that each person awakens to self-conscious participation in the gift of being as a child through the concrete love of its parents. In a challenge to ideals of the modern rational independent mature adult and the post-modern self-creating individual, this beginning means each person's self-conscious freedom coincides with childlike dependence on others. This reflects how Balthasar attributes a primordial and abiding significance to being childlike where a person's freedom is received from others as gift and most fully theirs when shared as gift in being for and with others. This receives its concrete and lasting measure in how each person responds to their parents and to God as the source of their freedom and existence. I argued that Balthasar understands this most fundamentally as the childlike and filial character of the human heart in its attunement to being's beauty and joy. This makes childlike openness to the gift of being paradigmatic for fully personal acts as enacted by the intellect and will in the encounters between subjects and objects.

In the third chapter, I employed Balthasar's account of the event of a child's birth and awakening to self-consciousness to explore what this unveils about the metaphysical significance of human sexual difference. I contrasted this both to Aristotelian metaphysical views of sexual difference and contemporary essentialist and constructivist positions. Balthasar's dramatic approach to human fruitfulness articulates how the male-female and parent-child relationships constitute extreme different ways of being fully human in openness to the gift of *esse* as it subsists within the transcendence of humanity's living spiritual form in the material realm. The force of Balthasar's metaphysics means that the transcendent freedom of being a person cannot be separated from how *esse* comes concretely to subsistence within the relationships between mother, father and child. Here I articulated a relationship of mutual subordination such that the relationship between the sexes exceeds itself into the parent-child relationship which nonetheless depends on human sexual difference. What we discovered is that each human person is always a child whose personal freedom depends on, is shaped by, yet exceeds their origin in sexual difference.

A key aspect of this third chapter was to critique how Balthasar's understanding of sexual difference fails to be faithful to this metaphysical vision which requires a reciprocity between the sexes that, while asymmetrical, does not support Balthasar's identification of the female with receptivity and the male with activity where the latter has primacy. Balthasar reduces adult childlike wonder at being to an abstract notion of feminine receptivity that is appropriated for the purposes of male fulfilment understood as either sexual fruitfulness or representing the divine. Despite his intentions,

Balthasar places the male outside the drama of human encounter, leaving the latter to female humanity while also devaluing the uniquely female way of being human. As an alternative to this, I focused on how differences in male and female fruitfulness are unveiled in relation to the being and awakening of a child to self-consciousness as gift. Here male and female are both actively receptive in their capacity for wonder where this is expressed differently according to their hearts' response to the objective reality of a child's new being. The pattern of correlated metaphysical fruitfulness that this encapsulates extends beyond the realm of the sexual and familial to all interpersonal interaction.

Finally, in chapter four, I explored how the metaphysical significance of these constitutive human relationships underpins Balthasar's understanding of being's transcendental aspects of beauty, goodness and truth wherein being's fruitfulness is enacted. I connected this to the primacy Balthasar allots to beauty as the transcendental that ensures goodness and truth remain open to the vital groundless mystery of being's unity-in-difference as the site of God's ever-greater gift of love to be shared. I argued that the male-female and parents-child relationships together constitute concrete co-principles of being's beauty. Each pole enacts and mediates to the other, in a correlated way, how being discloses itself as radiant *Gestalt* whose beauty calls to the human person to respond wholeheartedly with childlike wonder. This informs each person's enactment of the good and expression of truth. For Balthasar, if love is being's meaning then it is a love that finds its fullest expression in interpersonal relationships that live out being's beautiful good truth in its fruitful superabundance. This finds its measure in the fruit of a child who awakens to wonder through the love of its parents whose fruitfulness is shaped by how their human nature is opened to the gift of life which God has entrusted to the joint custodianship of male and female hearts.

The above offers a more comprehensive and concrete account of Balthasar's notion of meta-anthropology. The latter requires communicating being's beauty, goodness and truth; enacting the fruitful reciprocity of love that permeates these transcendentals; and, thereby, concretely expressing the superabundance of created being's analogical nature. This celebrates the unity that comes through affirming difference and the difference that is affirmed through ever-greater fruitful loving union. To this end, the constitutive relationships are of paradigmatic significance to how each person concretely lives out their meta-anthropological service to the whole in the particular. This rests especially on how these relationships are embedded within being's beauty.

The association of the constitutive relationships with beauty means their significance takes on the urgency Balthasar attributes to the latter:

[without beauty] the good...loses its attractiveness, the self-evidence of what must be carried out. Man stands before the good and asks himself why *it* must be done and not rather its alternative, evil. For this, too, is a possibility, and even the more exciting one: Why not investigate Satan's depths? In a world that no longer has enough confidence in itself to affirm the beautiful, the proofs of the truth have lost their cogency.... [T]he logic of these answers is itself a mechanism which no longer captivates anyone. The very conclusions are no longer conclusive. And if this is how the transcendentals fare because one of them has been banished, what will happen with Being itself? Thomas described Being (*das Sein*) as a 'sure light' for that which exists (*das Seiende*). Will this light not necessarily die out where the very language of light has been forgotten and the mystery of Being is no longer allowed to express itself? What remains is then a mere lump of existence which, even if it claims for itself the freedom proper to spirits, nevertheless remains totally dark and incomprehensible even to itself. The witness borne by Being becomes untrustworthy for the person who can no longer read the language of beauty.²

Beauty's importance attaches particularly to how beauty is anchored concretely to sexual difference and the parent-child relationship. These relationships set the parameters that safeguard the human capacity to 'read' beauty. It is particularly regarding them that the significance of beauty is played out to profound effect. Given their paradigmatic status, they represent a singularly formative interpersonal context wherein the service of being is pitted against all that would threaten the grace-like quality of being's beauty.

As the passage above indicates, such threats include a deadening moralism, alluring evil, arid rationalism, a cold technological outlook, a forgetfulness of being's superabundance, and an inability to perceive beauty's radiant *Gestalten*. This includes how the beautiful can be misconstrued either as mere superficial and escapist fantasy; or abyssal depths inimical to concrete forms. All these have a keen effect on the relationship between the sexes, and adults and children, and, therefore, the human capacity to enact what is real. As hinted in the above passage, this is expressed, in theological terms, in the struggle with Satan's false depths. Echoing the book of Revelation, this can be construed as a battle over communicating being's primal form that rages with regard to children; the childlike response of the heart to beauty; and, the male and female communication of being's beautiful good truth as divine gift.³ As Balthasar says elsewhere: 'no *transcendentale* is more

² *GL1*, 19.

³ See *TD4*, 21. Balthasar refers to the heightened resistance to the victory of the Lamb that is attendant upon the deep things of Satan (Cf., Revelation, 2:24; 13:11). At *TD4*, 34, 468, Balthasar references the dragon's

demonic than the *kalon*.... [T]he beautiful is only an appearance breathed out over what passes away: who knows whether it is an appearing of God or the seeming appearance of nothing.' As with a diminished sense of being, beauty tends to nothingness 'whenever man thinks he can master it in his transcendental reason: then the heavens praise the glory of man and the glory which they seemed to praise is quenched.'⁴

Furthermore, by recognising a certain spiritual freedom attends being considered simply as a 'mere lump of existence', Balthasar implicitly draws a distinction between, first, a fully interpersonal integrated spiritual existence and, secondly, a non-integrated spiritual one. The first, integrated perspective matches the focus of this thesis. It encompasses the whole of human nature's participation in being, the circumincessive relationship of the transcendentals, the reciprocity of love between persons, and the asymmetrical reciprocal relationship between male and female adults vis-à-vis the birth of a child and its awakening to self-consciousness.

The second, non-integrated perspective, while spiritual is not a response of the whole human being. It abstractly privileges one aspect of humanity's spiritual nature over others. Thus, fruitfulness might be expressed predominantly in terms of the intellect, the will, or the imagination – that is, according to the true, the good or the beautiful where these are isolated from each other and dissociated from being itself. This may be done in the name of personhood, yet a personhood abstractly detached from concrete human nature and the constitutive relationships. It risks elevating one sex over the other or an adult perspective against that of a child. Conversely, it may misappropriate the child's viewpoint by fomenting an idealistic childishness which refuses an adult maturity that maintains a childlike openness to being's beauty amid the trials and joys of daily existence. Such abstractions reduce human spiritual nature to less than it is, flattening the differences at the heart of being, especially differences deemed deficient, transitional, weak or superficial. Moreover, these perspectives may siphon off areas of fruitfulness that lose their rootedness in being's fruitfulness, and so encourage a false fecundity that undermines the ontological depth of personal reality wherein fruitfulness finds its true ontological expression as love. For Balthasar, this tendency towards favouring the impersonal, abstract and all-too-adult perspective reflects the (ultimately futile) attempts of the demonic to undermine the personal as divine gift.⁵

persecution of the woman, the war he wages on her offspring, and the decisive victory in the 'birth of the Child.' The latter concludes the *proto-evangelion* of Genesis 3:15 where God puts enmity between the offspring of the woman and serpent. Cf., *TD4*, 47.

⁴ *GL4*, 38.

⁵ Cf., *TD3*, 497.

As suggested at various points in this discussion, the possibilities and risks of this second approach have become pressing within a cultural context which elevates certain models of scientific knowledge and technological intervention.⁶ This extends to constructing non-living, material and spiritual-like technological beings that move and exhibit a certain intelligence, but are lifeless and impersonal. Even before the developments of recent decades, Balthasar feared that technology collaborates negatively with being's diminution, and being's wonder and fruitfulness. He worried that '[h]uman hearts have been...crushed and trampled on in this age of the robot.'⁷ The human risked becoming *anima techna vacua*.⁸ As Balthasar observed in 1987,

[t]he age of science has replaced the era of philosophy. The "exactness" of the physical sciences is held up as the model for the life sciences and the humanities. At the same time, the aim of science is seen, with fewer and fewer exceptions, to lie in controlling or "changing" whatever comes within its grasp. Science subordinates itself to technology and productivity. The consequences of this restriction are tragic: we get precisely the opposite of what we bargained for: slavery, not freedom. For technology does not liberate but actually enslaves man on every level. But these tragic consequences can occasionally, at least by implication, afford us a glimpse of the unrestricted philosophical question.⁹

This is the question of why anything at all and so concerns the human capacity for wonder at being and ultimately the person's capacity for love. To lose a sense of how the human is proportionate to being's splendour, forecloses on the dignity of the essential reality of each being, especially the human person and, even more so, the different sexes and the child as ways of being human that come not by our own making but by gift. Furthermore, such forgetfulness of being and spirit risks shutting out the possibility of encountering theological reality which, while entirely God's free gift, is always, for Balthasar and Catholic tradition alike, mediated by the gift of being; the same being whose gift-like character shines out with declarative force in the demands and vulnerabilities of a child.

Balthasar puts it in stark terms when he fears that human culture,

⁶ For explorations echoing Balthasar, see David L. Schindler, "The Meaning of the Human in a Technological Age: *Homo faber, Homo sapiens, Homo amans*," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 26, (1999): 80-103. Cf., Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and, Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, 307-341.

⁷ *P*, 100.

⁸ *E*, 11.

⁹ *E*, 23.

will necessarily fall under the sign of the constant dominion of “knowledge,” and... science, technology, and cybernetics will overpower and suffocate the forces of love within the world. The result will be a world without women, without children, without reverence for the form of love in poverty and humility, a world in which everything is viewed solely in terms of power or profit-margin, in which everything that is disinterested and gratuitous and useless is despised, persecuted, and wiped out, and even art is forced to wear the mask and the features of technique.¹⁰

This needs to be extended. Such a wholesale forgetfulness would also result in a world without men, and, ultimately, without human persons whose hearts are fashioned, in the intimacy of concrete loving human relationships, for the joy of childlike wonder at being’s radiant beauty as gift. As Balthasar says ‘[h]owever perfect things may be, man will never improve his heart through them; the world will only be filled with love by making ultimate decisions for love, and never through the ameliorations of technology.’¹¹ Balthasar is not seeking to demonise science and technology. Indeed, his metaphysics underpins the integrity of the search for knowledge embodied within the sciences.¹² Rather he seeks to champion a metaphysics that abides in the wonder of being as divine gift; including, the questions it asks and knowledge and activity it promotes. The key is not that technological developments are intrinsically problematic but whether they affirm the primacy of beauty as the union of good and truth, and the paradigmatic importance to beauty of human sexual difference and the parent-child relationship.

Balthasar’s insistence on the metaphysical significance of beauty and the constitutive human relationships has far-reaching implications across society and culture, raising several ethical questions, for example, concerning the impact of child abuse; the meaning and make-up of the family; children’s education; the effects of social media; ubiquitous access to pornography; ongoing debates about gender identity; and bio-ethical issues focussed on reproduction and genetics. To take one illustrative example: the possibility of artificial wombs (ectogenesis). Confronted with the non-viability of a woman’s womb, the following represents a real possibility:

An artificial womb could present a better alternative to commercial surrogacy, which many denounce as exploitative. It might also mean that the divide between mother and father can be dispensed with: a womb outside a woman’s body would serve women, transwomen and male same-sex couples equally without prejudice. If an artificial womb is created, it will

¹⁰ *LAC*, 142.

¹¹ *GL5*, 654.

¹² Cf., Hanby, “Aesthetic Analogy,” 351-363.

mean that women will be freed from the dangers of pregnancy, and create a more equal distribution of “labour”, with women able to work throughout gestation. It will also give men an essential tool to have a child entirely without a woman, should they choose. It will ask us to question concepts of gender and parenthood.¹³

Based on Balthasar’s metaphysics it would be wrong simply to dismiss this. What is required instead is careful discernment to test whether new procedures around the beginning of life serves the joy and beauty of the gift of being. Specifically, does our use of technology serve the wonder of a child whose uniqueness as spirit open to the gift of being and wholehearted attunement to the latter depends on adults who are themselves capable of affirming, through their heart’s wonder, being’s giftedness as personally mediated via the reciprocity of sexual difference? Alternatively, does it advance a view that ultimately places the desires and choices of adults against those of the child and any differences that are not self-chosen?

From the former perspective, we could affirm the use of artificial wombs, say, for a premature baby in safeguarding the wonder of a child as gift. The conclusions of the passage above, however, despite ostensibly valid ethical reasons, support the latter perspective. Absent is any consideration of a child as gift, as spirit whose existence and freedom is shaped for gift by concrete relationships of self-giving love that are irreducible to mere choice because rooted in the heart’s openness to being’s beauty as concretely manifested in sexual difference which opens to being as divine gift not human commodity. It also introduces the prospect of a child owing their self-conscious existence to a technological surrogate parent, and, behind this, various commercial and political interests. As Antonio López says, ‘[n]ot being the natural fruit of their parents’ love, children conceived by recourse to a third party perceive their belonging to their purported parents as a violation of their identity; they cannot be received as a gift because they were instead procured as a commodity put at service of fulfilling their parents’ cravings for fruitfulness.’¹⁴ This extends to the cravings of commercial and state enterprise.

More broadly, the urgent metaphysical question is whether the secondary forms of human existence, activity and production serve and retain their vital connection to being’s primal form; or, whether the latter is obscured by them; or, indeed, an attempt is made to dissolve form altogether which, however, simply asserts a more all-encompassing yet hidden and unaccountable secondary

¹³ Aarathi Prasad, “How artificial wombs will change our ideas of gender, family and equality,” *The Guardian*, May 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/01/artificial-womb-gender-family-equality-lamb>.

¹⁴ Antonio López, “Affirming Childhood: The Form of Familial Relations,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 44, (2017): 626.

form, namely, that of pure human construction and consumption. In this twilight of ossified secondary forms, Balthasar notes it is more difficult and easier to reclaim being's primal form. '[O]ur eyes lose their acumen for form and we become accustomed to read things by starting from the bottom and working our way up, rather than by working from the whole to the parts.... But in this valueless openness, the way back to primal form has perhaps been cleared....'¹⁵ The dissolution of secondary forms may further entrench the hegemony of the individual or collective will to destroy and create its own forms. Or, it may herald the advent of beauty's fruitfulness. The primal form's beauty can dawn anew, unconstrainedly, wherever there is being. This, however, cannot be enforced. It appeals to the freedom of the heart's attunement to being. As Balthasar says, 'the Beautiful never overwhelms those who resist it but, by its grace, makes prisoners of those who are freely convinced.'¹⁶ More concretely, beauty's capacity for renewal wherever secondary forms of existence have stagnated or atrophied attaches paradigmatically to the mutual grounded-ness and fruitfulness of human sexual difference and the parent-child relationship. They not only provide a metaphysical standard for judging whether secondary forms are true to being's primal form. They also inscribe into human nature a responsiveness to being as beautiful gift that cannot entirely be suppressed but offers the hope of wonder that arrives anew with each person's birth and coming to self-consciousness.

As Gardner and Moss say, with Balthasar, this insists on 'the cleaving of Being to birth' where 'sexual difference is the *chiasm* of creation. Which is to say...the world *as threshold*. Creation is the site for the gift of life which knows itself only in its differencing to and from God.'¹⁷ I add this is true insofar as sexual difference is seen in the light of its metaphysical fruit, namely, the gift of a child's heart stirred into wonder at the gift of love. Balthasar says, 'the power of Being...resides in the conferring of form...[where] the spirit which is immanent in form manifests itself radiantly through it.'¹⁸ If so, then the reclamation of the primal form's beauty rests primordially and paradigmatic in the ever-present possibility of the wonder of a child which is the preserve of the fruitfulness of male and female humanity, understood not only as sexual but as interpersonal love whose pattern of fruitfulness is undergirded by yet transcends the sexes' correlated responses to being's beauty. In their mutual grounded-ness, the sexes are the concrete wellspring of the groundlessness of being's beauty as manifested decisively in the radiant *Gestalt* of a human child awoken to self-consciousness.

¹⁵ *GL1*, 25.

¹⁶ *TD2*, 35.

¹⁷ Gardner and Moss, "Something like the Sexes," 73.

¹⁸ *GL1*, 22.

This estimation of the metaphysical mission of human sexual difference and the wonder of a child is, for Balthasar, presupposed yet exceeded by Jesus' admonishment to his followers to value children and reclaim childlikeness in the image of Jesus' divine childhood. This comes as gift. Jesus 'can give them childhood – which is ultimately his own mode of existence – as a model by which to live. Indeed, he can communicate to them his own Spirit, that is, the gift of his own youthfulness in person.'¹⁹ This indicates a Christological and Trinitarian basis for affirming how adults abide in childlikeness. For Balthasar, '[t]his mystery places us beyond the opposition between seriousness and play. There is no more serious responsibility for God than the creation of the world, yet the Wisdom that stands at his side treats the whole business as a form of play...'²⁰ This applies especially to adults responsible for fostering children. They participate in the serious responsibility of bringing into existence a new spirit as a unique divine gift. Yet, this is not simply their doing but must be received by them with the wonder that characterises their own status as children born of others and welcomed into being's playfulness. While Balthasar acknowledges the seriousness involved, ultimately it is the playful openness to being as gift that marks human life.

There is a close connection between childhood and death: the essential secret of both consists, quite simply, in the act of handing over the gift. It is in physical nakedness that the child enters the world, and it is in spiritual nakedness that he must entrust himself, stripped of all power, to the mystery of the Father. Everything between birth and death is a parenthesis. The seriousness of this parenthesis is part of God's game, but at either end it is the aspect of play that stands out most prominently. The Father's Child who proceeds from him eternally also returns to him eternally and in every moment of time. And this is the game that we, God's other children, are invited to play....²¹

Read one way this gives an impression of a child left to itself who is forced at death to abandon itself to God. Yet this interpretation belongs to the individual autonomous adult self. If interpreted with Balthasar's metaphysical vision, the childlike handing over of the gift of being is something each person is constitutionally predisposed to do because they are the fruit of human sexual difference and their heart is awoken to self-conscious freedom by others. Handing over the gift of being is a function of having already received oneself from beyond oneself. Just as a child's physical nakedness denotes not aloneness but dependence on the nurturing love of others; similarly, spiritual nakedness indicates the human spirit's fundamental dependence on others to be freely itself. That we are born,

¹⁹ *ExT5*, 222.

²⁰ *ExT5*, 216.

²¹ *ExT5*, 217.

not made, children of sexual difference constitutes us as the gift of others' capacity for gift. Even where such openness to gift is not forthcoming or rejected, nonetheless because they came into the wonder of being as children of others, metaphysically speaking, each person's heart is always ready to be transformed by wonder into childlike openness to God's creative play of love, whether at their beginning, middle or end.

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